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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOU KNOW I CARED FOR YOU TOO WELL TO WEIGH MY WEALTH AGAINST YOUR DEAR LOVE!" SAID MAHALA, PASSIONATELY.

A WOMAN'S WORK.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

UNDER cover of the gloomy night a woman stole out of Heronhaye Hall, and, after glancing furtively round, hurried towards the shrubbery. She was enveloped from head to foot in a long, black cloak, which effectually concealed the outlines of her figure, and the hood was drawn so closely about her face that nothing could be seen of it but a pair of dark and flashing eyes. Passing hastily through the gardens she came to the very confines of the shrubbery, and there stood a man, evidently waiting for her, for, with an exaggerated bow, he came forward, saying,—

"At last, Mahala! I thought I should have to call at the house. I have been here two hours exactly."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You were over-punctual, Jacob, and I could not possibly join you before; I am entertaining;

friends to-night. It would have been easier and wiser to write me than to send me a message to meet you. It is not safe, and I have my position to consider."

"Precisely," he answered, with pronounced Hebraic accent, "and I am the sport of fortune. But it isn't well in prosperity to forget old friends, old servants, Mahala, and I have served you faithfully."

"Because it was to your interest to do so," she retorted, scornfully, "and I paid you generously for your services. Now tell me what you want of me, and let me go; I shall be missed."

"I want money to start me afresh in life."

"That was not part of our bargain; you received your wage, and it is nothing to me that you lost it in mad speculation. For once a Jew has been cozened by a Christian. That is turning the tables with a vengeance."

"It is generous to take that tone with me. Where would you be if I had not been as loyal a friend as a cousin? Whilst you have been living in luxury I have led a dog's life."

"The fault was your own; but I have no wish to be harsh with you, Jacob, so take what I have brought with me (tendering him her purse), and

to-morrow I will forward you a cheque for five hundred. But I really should not advise you to presume upon our relationship, or even to make it public. I can assure you I am not proud of it."

The man stood silent a moment; then he said,—

"Have you a heart at all, I wonder? Did you ever give a tender thought to any save yourself? Mahala, I am forty; I have nothing of my own. I have lost position, everything I cared for; but I honestly believe that if you would listen to me, out in another country I could regain all I have lost."

She laughed scornfully, and the hood falling back from her head revealed a lovely face.

"Jacob, are you mad?" she asked. "You are fifteen years my senior; you are—excuse my plain speaking—ugly and a trifle underbred; you have everything to gain by marriage with me; I have everything to lose, and so let us resolve not to return to this subject any more. You had best be going. I will see you at some early date, and at a place appointed by myself. You must not come here any more."

"Very well," he said, sullenly. "Will you let me kiss you good-bye?"



Reluctantly she turned her velvety cheek to him, and when he had kissed it she daintily rubbed it with her filmy handkerchief as though his touch were poison to her.

"Good-bye," she said, and fitted through the gloom, back to the house, whilst slowly and heavily he made his way towards the village station, thinking of the beautiful woman who disdained his suit.

Heronhaye House was all ablaze with lights, and having slipped off her cloak Mahala St. Mark ran swiftly up to her beautiful boudoir.

A tall, fair girl, with an exquisite face and imperial manner, rose from a chair to meet her.

"Mrs. Coningsby claimed Fifiue," she said, in a low, musical voice, "and so I laid out your jewels and dress. You have very little time left in which to make your toilet."

"I stayed too long below; but Mrs. Spenser can receive the guests, and you will help me to dress, dear. It was like Laura Coningsby to steal my maid; she is the very essence of selfishness. Oh, I won't wear diamonds to-night. Give me the rubies, Valerie; I like vivid contrasts, and there isn't a fleck of colour on my gown to spoil their effect."

Presently the two went down together, Miss St. Mark wearing white satin and the unrivalled Heronhaye rubies; her companion, Valerie Grant, dressed in black net, unrelieved by any touch of colour save at the throat, where she had fastened a cluster of crimson roses.

No greater contrast could be conceived than this which existed between the two.

Mahala St. Mark, mistress of Heronhaye, with all its land and revenues, was a gloriously handsome woman of twenty-five. Her features were of the Semitic type; her complexion olive, with clear red shining through each soft cheek; her eyes large, dark, and languishing (save in moments of anger or annoyance), and the rich gown, the flashing jewels she wore were admirably calculated to enhance her many charms.

Her companion was of equal stature with herself, although of slighter build, and her beauty was of the true Saxon style. The coronet of hair which adorned her proud little head was of purest gold, her eyes purple grey, and in her mien there was a gracious pride, although she was only Miss St. Mark's paid companion.

"By Jove!" said one young fellow to another. "What a magnificent contrast; you wouldn't find two lovelier girls in England—if I have a preference for either, it is Miss St. Mark—she is gloriously dark—being fair myself, you know, I look out for contrasts."

And at the same time a county dame was whispering to Mrs. Spenser (Miss St. Mark's chaperone)—

"There is something I don't quite like about Mahala, and it is awfully curious that old Augustus Heronhaye should have left his property to her to the exclusion of Valerie, who really was his second cousin."

"Nothing curious in it at all," rejoined Mrs. Spenser. "Mr. Heronhaye wanted to marry Miss St. Mark, she was always his favourite ward."

"I did not use to think so, and if I were a man I would rather marry Valerie Grant without a penny than Mahala St. Mark with all her wealth. Valerie is a lady, and Mahala is only the daughter of a Jewish money lender who came to grief—the St. is a mere piece of affection, her true name is Mahala Marks, and I have that item on good authority."

"With all due deference, I think you have been misinformed," said Mrs. Spenser, quietly, "and Miss St. Mark is very good to me, never allowing me to feel my dependent position. I have cause to be grateful to her," and with the light remark,—

"Ah! you are prejudiced in her favour," the lady allowed the subject to drop.

Amongst the guests there was a young man of good presence, although his face was not handsome; the jaw was somewhat heavy, the mouth (as much as could be seen of it under the dark moustache), was very firm, and from under level brows looked out a pair of deep set, keen brown eyes.

This was Duncan Moyse, a clever and rising

young architect, whose genius had not yet brought much reward in the form of riches.

The wise ones of Heronhaye declared that Miss St. Mark singled him from all others as the recipient of her favours, and wondered that he should be so blind as not to see and accept the advantages an alliance with the heiress offered. Now she moved slowly amongst her guests, coming at last to his side, and the rubies burned like fire about her column-like throat, in the masses of her raven hair. With a gracious smile she tendered her hand.

"It is good of you to come. I was afraid that at the last moment some unforeseen and unwelcome business would prevent your joining us, you have so very little leisure."

"I have my way to make yet," he answered, smiling into her eyes, for they were almost of equal stature. "When I have earned my rest I will take it."

"Come and see my portrait; Valerie says it is perfection; but remember, I want your unbiased opinion. Dudley painted it, and he has a great name in the world of art."

Duncan Moyse followed his hostess to an adjoining room, the walls of which were adorned with portraits of the later Heronhayes, and amongst them all, in the place of honour, hung Mahala's portrait. Valerie Grant had not praised it too highly, it was indeed perfection, and the woman's eyes grew bright as Duncan said,—

"It has only to breathe to be yourself. I almost expect to see you step out of the frame; Dudley's heart was in his work."

"I am so glad it pleases you," she said very softly. "I have a great reverence for your opinion on all subjects; because you always give it without favour."

"Thank you, Miss St. Mark; you compliment me highly, and now let me take you back to your guests."

She would fain have lingered with him, for with all the force of her strong nature she loved him, and it was her one aim to win a return of her passion; to make him speak those words which should open the gates of Elysium to her. But his heart was a sealed book, and she feared that her wealth would seem an insuperable barrier to him. She stood silent a moment, her breath coming a little faster, then she said,—

"You think, perhaps, Mr. Moyse, that I am a most fortunate and happy woman?"

"That would be the opinion of any outsider I should say."

"Yes, the world judges us by appearances; but I am not quite so lucky as I seem. You look incredulous."

"Do you wonder? You have position, wealth, beauty and youth. What more can the heart of woman desire?"

"Friendship!" she answered, swiftly, "and in all the world I stand alone, having neither relative nor friend."

"You surely are forgetting Miss Grant; her regard for you is at least sincere."

"You say regard rightly—friendship is beyond Valerie; she is perfectly passionless, and I yearn to find a kindred spirit—or rather some one wise enough to advise me how to use my fortune and influence for good; who is truthful enough to chide me when I fall into error (you see I am a woman and weak) and yet who is mortal enough to give me true affection." She awayed a little towards him then, and her eyes were soft and dewy. "Mr. Moyse, will you be my friend? you will not find me *exigante*."

He was startled by her words, and stood silent a moment whilst the scent of her robes came towards him, and the rubies about her throat gleamed fiery red. Then he said gravely,—

"The world—our world, Miss St. Mark—does not approve platonic friendships. I am too busy a man to cultivate any society, and not at all the wise sort of fellow you are pleased to think me. But if I can in any way, and at any time serve you, you have but to command me."

"Thank you," she said, her voice full of disappointment. "I will remember. But it is always the same with me. I ask for bread and receive a stone; let us join the others."

The next instant she was laughing and talking gaily, apparently forgetful of her recent discom-

forture; and Duncan was too little versed in the intricacies of woman's nature to guess that under that smiling exterior she hid an aching heart; that to herself she was saying,—

"Must I always woo, and he repel? Will he never love me, who have given him of my best? What do I care for my beauty if he takes no delight in it? My love! my love! Show me some mercy."

Her duties as hostess took her from his side, and Duncan, who was not in the least a society man, was glad to escape from the laughter and babble into the quiet night. The sky had lightened now, and a host of stars were glittering in the deep blue vault; he took a deep breath of pleasure as he inhaled the crisp air.

"This is good," he said, and then suddenly he became aware of a figure close by him upon the terrace. "I am glad to find myself not peculiar; it appears that Heronhaye has a lover of nature, too," he remarked; and with a little laugh, Valerie Grant said,—

"Yes, you have not the monopoly of that appreciation."

He went to her side.

"Aren't you afraid of taking cold?" he asked.

"I—oh, no! I am very strong, and my wrap is warm."

"Do you often leave the revellers in this unceremonious fashion?"

"Yes; why not? I am not missed, and I like the silence and rest of the night." As she spoke she looked at him, seeing something so new and strange in his expression, that she averted her eyes, and a faint wave of colour overspread the proud, pure face; with a sense almost of anger she felt her heart beat faster than its wont, and her voice had a touch of coldness in it, when she spoke again.

"I ought not to be here, however, when Mahala has so many people to entertain; I must be going in."

"Not yet," he pleaded, hardly guessing how much of entreaty there was in his tone. "I so rarely see you. I don't call it seeing you when you are so surrounded by others that I have no chance of speech; and—" as she hesitated, "I have something I wish to tell you; perhaps I am a little bit superstitious, and believe that your good wishes or congratulations have something magical in them."

"I am very much afraid, then, that you will be disappointed," she said smiling; "pray let me hear your pleasant news."

"I am the successful candidate for the new college of music at Branton; my plans have not only been approved but received high praise; that means much for me."

"I am inexpressibly glad," she said earnestly, "and prophesy that now your foot is on the ladder of fame you can only ascend. You have genius and are ambitious;" as she spoke she gave him her slender hand; he took and held it fast, as he looked into her beautiful eyes.

"Thank you," he said simply. "I shall remember your words and endeavour to prove them true. But the prize I struggle for is a great one, and my chance seems small; still—"

"If you have set your heart upon winning it you will succeed; take that good old-fashioned motto 'Nil Desperandum for your own and set upon it.'"

"I shall gladly obey you;" then, with some confusion, "Miss Grant, will you think me a presumptuous fool, if I ask you for one of the roses you are wearing, to keep as a reminder of your kind wishes and encouraging words."

She hesitated a moment; Valerie Grant was a proud woman, and not prone to give her favours lightly, or show anything of her heart's deep feelings; she would not be won before she was wooed; but something in Duncan's manner moved her to compliance. Separating one fragrant bud from its fellows, she said: "May this bring you good fortune," and fitted from him back to the house. He watched until he could see her no longer, then he did a thing which none of those who knew him would have believed of him. Passionately he kissed the crimson bud, before placing it carefully in his pocket-book, and as passionately whispered, "My darling! my darling! you are the prize I covet. Heaven help me to win you!"

CHAPTER II.

THREE years before the opening of this story Mahala St. Mark had come into her inheritance to the surprise of all the country people, who had regarded Valerie Grant as Augustus Heronhaye's heiress.

She was a remote cousin, and he had adopted her at the early age of six, was apparently both fond and proud of her, so that the terms of his will created the greatest surprise.

Mahala had come to Heronhaye when Valerie was sixteen; she herself being twenty-one. She had no claim upon Augustus Heronhaye, but her father had once done him a kindly deed, and when, at his decease, she was left penniless, the grateful old man opened his doors to her.

Little by little her influence grew upon him, step by step she contested the right of position with the unconscious Valerie (who honestly loved the beautiful Jewess), winning her guardian's affection to herself.

Finally, he brought his infatuation to a climax by asking Mahala to become his wife. She hesitated, knowing all that she would lose if she refused him, and yet desiring him for his folly.

Then she temporised with him, and he being plastic in her hands consented to wait six months for her reply.

Before they had expired Augustus Heronhaye had gone to join the great majority, and by his will he bequeathed all his possessions to Mahala St. Mark.

The will was drawn up by Mr. Jacob Powell, an old friend of Mahala's, into whose hands she had persuaded her benefactor to transfer his business, and it was duly witnessed by the butler and housekeeper.

"It was a shameful piece of injustice," said Valerie's friends. The girl herself made no complaint, and, in answer to condolences, said—

"My cousin had a perfect right to please himself with regard to the disposition of his property; he was much attached to Mahala, and she is very good to me." Then, the last sad rites ended, she went to Miss St. Mark. "Mahala," she said, "you know I do not envy you your fortune, so you will not take it amiss when I say I must set to work now to earn my own living. I cannot eat the bread of charity, and I have no claim upon you."

"You have the claim of affection, dear," responded the other; "and I could not know an hour's happiness if you left your rightful home. The will by which I benefit is an unjust one. Stay with me and share with me all that should be yours."

But Valerie was obstinate. She had, all the pride of her race—all the instinctive hatred of charity which marks the English character.

Now, it was not Mahala's policy to let her go, when the whole country was somewhat hostile towards her, so after much argument, she said—

"Why will you be so proud with me; it is not charity I offer, are we not like sisters? There, you incomprehensible, impracticable girl, have your own headstrong way, so that you do not leave me) and stay as my companion. You know how I muddle my accounts and what a wretched correspondent I am; take these duties off my shoulders, and name your own remuneration."

So Valerie stayed, naming a modest sum, which Mahala increased to eighty pounds annually, and, like, seeing the union between the two, forgave what they considered Mahala's usurpation, and did homage to her.

It was a cause of some surprise, that she had not yet married. To herself she said—

"I will take no name but *his* in lieu of my own. Oh, that he would speak; this suspense is so hard to bear!"

She was sitting with Valerie the day following her great dinner, her jewelled fingers were tightly interwoven and her eyes had a brooding look. Valerie, steadily writing, paid no heed to her until presently she said—

"Do put away that stupid work. Canst you be idle for one morning? To see you one would suppose I am the typical slave-owner, and I want to talk to you."

Valerie, with a smile, put aside her desk.

"I am ready to listen. What is the matter,

Mahala, you look as though you had the cares of the whole nation upon your shoulders."

The other sighed and seemed not too ready to begin the conversation for which she had been so eager, and Valerie was growing just a wee bit impatient, when her slow words broke the silence.

"I want to put an imaginary case to you, and to hear your decision upon it. Suppose, for awhile, that a woman, young, clever, rich and decidedly handsome, loved a man who though gently born, had neither land nor wealth, that she had good reason to believe he returned her affection, but that pride and poverty alike held him dumb, would not allow him to plead his own cause, what should that woman do?"

"She could do simply nothing, but wait his pleasure," Valerie said, quietly, yet with an odd thrill of pain at her heart. "No man esteems a woman who usurps his privileges."

"But," urged Mahala, impatiently, "should she allow the wreck of two lives just because of an old-world scruple? What would you do were you so situated?"

"I would die rather than give my love unasked, or risk the loss of his esteem; and I think I should be strong enough to hide my pain from all."

With an impatient gesture Mahala sat erect. "You are too cold to love, save in a common place and highly orthodox style—I, when I give my heart, will give it wholly, freely, without stint or measure—and oh! I would have no mercy on the woman who endeavoured to come between my love and me!" Her eyes flashed and her cheeks grew pale with emotion.

Suddenly she stretched out her hand to Valerie. "You cannot understand me, how should you? but at least pity me—comfort me with the assurance that he—Duncan Moya, loves me. Why do you take away your hand?"

Valerie rose. She had long suspected Miss St. Mark's passion, but there was something horribly indelicate in this open confession of it—and after her last night's interview with Duncan, it seemed to her rankest treachery to receive Mahala's confidences. She said, with a tremor in her usually even tones—

"Pray say no more; to-morrow you will regret your words—and I am not the keeper of Mr. Moya's conscience. Cannot you think kindly of any other? There is Cuthbert Lethbridge, who has followed you like your shadow ever since you came to Heronhaye. He is an honourable gentleman—"

"He is not Duncan," interrupted Mahala, swiftly. "I can think of no one else; I am like Temnyson's Fatima—I will possess him or will die, and should another steal him from me I think I could kill her with as little compunction as I do this fly."

She looked in deadly earnest, and the proud pure face bent upon her, took an expression of scorn at such exaggerated language, disgusted Valerie, although there was fire under her ice, and her heart was as tender as it was true.

"I am glad that only I have heard your outburst, and I shall do my best to forget it. Dear Mahala, remember your woman's pride, and call on that to help you if things do not happen as you wish—the scorn of the man you worship, the ridicule of others, would be too cruel for you to bear."

But the other would not hear her; with a tempestuous sob she buried her face in the velvet cushions, and, seeing she was not amenable to reason, Valerie left her.

Out in the gardens, which were daily growing in beauty (for the spring was now advancing), she thought long and almost prayerfully over her own and Mahala's position. The latter had been kind to her, and thought Valerie, "perhaps I have erred in thinking he preferred my society (a blush rose to her cheek); it may be he loves her, and only lacks courage to speak; he shall not lack opportunity. And if it is Mahala he loves I shall know how to bear my trouble, and Heaven will help me to conquer the passion which then would be a sin. I did not guess, until he looked so earnestly, and spoke in such altered tones, that I had let my heart go out of my keeping—and I am ashamed!"

She stood a moment with the cold sunshine bathing her figure in light, making her golden hair shine like a halo about her beautiful face; then very slowly and thoughtfully she went back to the house.

Mahala was still in the same position, but she was quiet now, and Valerie, ignoring all that had gone before, said, "I forgot to say that I had a letter from Mattie Dawson this morning, inviting me to stay from Monday until Saturday with her; do you think it would be convenient for me to go?"

"Why not?" (sullenly) "you are neither help nor comfort."

A flush rose to the girl's cheek, but she was too used to the other's capricious moods to resent them very hotly, so merely thanking her for her ungracious consent, she went to write her letter of acceptance.

On the Monday she left for Brenton, Mahala bidding her an affectionate good-bye, for truth to tell she was very glad to think that if Duncan came to the Hall, she would now have the monopoly of his society.

But three days passed without bringing him, and she grew desperate; and in her desperation she wrote a little note to him, requesting that he would see her at his earliest convenience.

He called just at dusk that same evening, and finding her alone, began to apologise for the lateness of his visit; but she waived all apologies, going at once to her subject.

"It is very good of you to come so quickly, especially as it is a small matter upon which I wish to consult you. For a long time I have been thinking of building a summer room on the south side of the house, and as I want it to be an ideal room, I shall esteem it a great favour if you will draw up the plans. I shall spare no expense either in building or furnishing; and should we find it unpleasant to remain here with workmen about, we can spend a few weeks in town, although I would prefer watching the building operations—still I must not be selfishly forgetful of Mrs. Spencer's and Valerie's wishes. Will you undertake this small commission for me?"

"If you dare trust it to me," she answered, smiling.

"I am your debtor," and, through the gathering twilight her beautiful face shone like a radiant star.

"You will bring up your plans as quickly as possible?—I am so impatient to see my dream fulfilled. We can talk it over whilst we dine."

"I have already dined, thank you."

"Then you will let them bring you in coffee?"

"No, thanks; if I go home at once I shall be able to draft out some plans for your inspection by to-morrow. You will excuse me, Miss St. Mark?"

"Not to-morrow, and really my hurry is not so desperate. Won't you stay? I am so lonely with Valerie away. Why are you always in such haste to leave me? You pay a poor tribute to my hospitality and my powers of entertainment alike."

Something in her voice startled him, and he answered, confusedly—

"I am a wretched company at any time, especially when I have work in hand. A poor man cannot afford to be idle."

"You need not always be poor, Duncan; I have enough and to spare both for your needs and my own."

"I could not accept a loan from a woman," he answered, wilfully misunderstanding her, that he might spare her future shame and mortification. But she had crossed the rubicon, and would not go back if she could. She threw reserve and womanly pride to the winds as she said—

"You misunderstand me. Are you afraid to speak? Then hear me when I say I love you; I love you all the more for your poverty, and because I can give you those good things you lack. As your wife I can help you to fame, glorying in the triumphs which I shall have helped to win. Oh, Duncan! you should not have forced me to play such a part as this! Surely you knew I cared for you too well to weigh my wealth against your dear love!" and with a passionate gesture she stretched out her hands to him. He

his hand clasped nor touched them; he was repelled by her confession, and through all the grave pity of his tone there ran a note of scorn.

"Miss St. Mark, I am most grieved that you should have given yourself so much distress because of me; it was most generous of you to offer me such gifts, believing, as you did, that I cared for you too much for my peace of mind, and I can fully appreciate the struggle it cost you before you could bring yourself to it. But, fortunately, you are mistaken with regard to my feelings. I admire and esteem you greatly. I am grateful to you for your pity of my poor condition."

But she was like one gone mad; she would not let him snatch her from degradation, as she clung to his arm, crying,—

"It is not pity. Oh, hear me, and be merciful! Do not let pride separate us now! I love you, as Heaven is my witness, I love you!"

Then followed silence, broken only by her heavy sobs. To the man, this forgetfulness of womanly reserve was dreadful, and he could not tell how to frame his reply that it should hurt her but little. Presently she whispered,—

"Speak to me. Why are you so cruelly silent?"

"I was confounded, Miss St. Mark—Mahala. To-night you are not yourself; to-morrow, when you remember this scene, it will be to thank Heaven I did not avail myself of the gifts you offered. No, no!" as she essayed to speak, "you must hear me now. If I had loved you I think I would have risked being labelled fortune-hunter just to have won you; but I have no love to give. I speak plainly—it is better so; and let us forget that ever you dreamed this thing. I am honoured by your preference, which is far beyond my deserts, and until death believe me your true and devoted friend."

She fell away from him, her face blanched and her eyes wild.

"Is—there—another—woman?" she gasped. "Do not lie to me."

"There is; but she does not know I hold her dear; I have never spoken of my desire to her. She probably cares nothing for me."

"Good-bye," said Mahala, "good-bye; I should like to be alone now; and you—will you try to come as usual? I could not bear to be the subject of idle gossip. Forget what I have said, and let us part friends."

A moment her soft, cold hand rested in his; then, shivering, she withdrew it, and he went sadly out of her presence.

She listened to the last sound of his feet; then, with hasty hand, she lit the lamps, pulled down the blinds, and advancing towards a mirror looked long and fixedly at her own most beautiful reflection.

"Why could he not love me?" she said, twisting her hands together. "Oh, Heaven! how shall I bear this agony of pain! Duncan! Duncan! I will make you mine; no other woman shall win you from me; I will strike her out of my way. Have I been so long triumphant that I must be vanquished now?"

She fell on her knees with her arms thrown above her head.

"Degraded by my own act! Despised by him! But I will conquer yet!" and her eyes shone with lurid light, only to grow tender again as her thoughts turned to Duncan Moyse.

No matter what her faults might be she loved him with a whole heart; and perhaps, if Heaven had so willed it, she yet might have been a good woman if sheltered by his love.

Long she lay in the gathering night nursing her black and bitter thoughts.

When she rose her face was white as death, and her soul was full of hatred of her unknown rival.

"Who is it? who is it?" she questioned of herself. "She shall not claim him hers whilst I have breath."

CHAPTER III.

VALERIE, on her return from Brenton, found Mahala capricious and most uncertain in her moods; but she did not at any time speak of Duncan, who came at intervals on business purposes intent.

Miss St. Mark had made choice of a design, which was a gem in its way, and presently builders would be making the lovely old gardens ring with laughter, as they applied themselves to their labour. In a sudden freak Mahala determined to go to town.

"I have positively nothing to wear," she said to her chaperone; "and a week's dissipation will be good for me. Valerie can remain behind; there are so many things for her to superintend."

And so Mrs. Spenser and she left Heronhay jubilation, for Mahala hoped that in Duncan's case "absence would make the heart grow fonder"; and Valerie ruled alone.

It was curious how often Duncan's presence was then required at the Hall; and how wonderful that such a busy man should have so much leisure at his disposal.

Into Valerie's heart there crept a great joy; "he loved her"; every look, every tone of his voice told her that, and although she was full of pity for Mahala, she did not think to make shipwreck of his life and hers, because another woman loved him. That would be wanton cruelty, and she hoped that Mahala's passion would burn itself out.

At the close of the week, the latter wrote that she was enjoying her visit so greatly that she had determined to extend it, at least another fortnight, being certain that she left the Hall in the best of care, and that no supervision was needed with regard to the new room, other than that Mr. Moyse appointed.

When she saw Duncan, Valerie gave him Miss St. Mark's message, which indeed seemed not to interest him at all; for he immediately said, "I am going to forget business; and its attendant worries just for to-day, if you will help me."

"I!" smiled Valerie; "what can I do? Tell me what you wish."

"To row you down to Claybrick if the day is not too cold" (it was early April); "I have a whole afternoon at my disposal. Will you come?"

She hesitated an instant, thinking of Mahala, and loth, like all proud women, to accord a favour lightly, but her heart pleaded for her lover, and presently she said "Yes, I will come; I am almost weary of my own society."

"Then we will go at once; be careful to bring a good supply of wraps, because the wind is keen, although the sun has considerable power."

In a little while she returned, carrying a crimson cloak upon her arm, and wearing a dress of deep rich brown, which threw her golden hair and exquisite skin into bold relief.

"I am quite ready," she said, "you will acknowledge that I made my toilet with all speed."

"Yes, I hardly know yet whether to believe the evidence of my own sight or no; I always understood a lady's toilet was a complicated and lengthy affair."

"I am glad to shake your belief in such a fable;" and with that they went out together into the spring sunshine, down where beyond the grounds the shining river lay. Under the budding chestnuts, between the half-clad alders, the light boat sped on its way, and for awhile its occupants were very quiet.

Duncan apparently was intent upon his oars, Valerie was quite content to look round on the ever changing, ever beautiful scenery; but after awhile the young man looking up said,—

"I think I am going to surprise you very much, Miss Grant. You remember the cottage at the entrance of Claybrick proper; it used to be called the River House, but its last owner gave it the more pretentious title of Riversdale Lodge."

"I am ashamed to confess it, living so near Claybrick as we do, but I have never seen the place."

"Then I have a treat in store for you! it is a perfect little gem in its way, and I have recently been fortunate enough to purchase it at a very low rate. I have a great affection for the place; I was born there, and lived there until my mother died, which was a year before you came to Heronhay. Then the place had to be sold, in accordance with my father's will; he left very little behind, and my future was a source of anxiety to

him; but from the time my articles expired I vowed to myself that I would never rest until the River House was mine again. I have been more fortunate than I dared to hope; and presently I enter into possession, having engaged a respectable widow to act as housekeeper; my menage will be a very humble one at first."

"I am glad your desire has been gratified; this is the prize for which you were striving!"

"Once—yes; now I look to win a greater; any former triumph will fade into nothingness if I fail in my endeavour."

They spoke afterwards of indifferent things, and sighting at last a long low house surrounded by a verandah, Duncan made for the bank, and having moored his boat safely, gave his hand to Valerie, leading her up the steep incline to a very wilderness of a garden.

"It is in an awfully neglected state, of course," he said, "but that can quickly be remedied; will you go into the house now?"

She consenting, he unlocked the door which was sheltered by an ivied porch, and presently they were exploring the house together. It was more commodious than at first it looked; it was only two stories high, but the rooms were large and airy, if somewhat low, the carvings, unique, whilst the dining-room which boasted some beautiful frescoes, especially pleased Valerie. She turned with a look of approval to say,—

"You should be very proud of your homestead."

"I am; now let me take you to the rear; the finest view in all the county is to be seen from the south verandah."

As they stepped into the open once more, Valerie gave an exclamation of delight; before them lay gently undulating fields of tender green corn, grassy slopes rising gradually until they ended just where the purple crowned hills reared themselves against the pale blue and saffron of an early spring sky, whilst the sunlight fell in mellow patches upon dark clumps of trees and along the beaten way. The girl gave a sigh of utter and complete delight.

"This is a veritable paradise," she said, under her breath.

"Will you make it your home, Valerie? I am a poor man, and I could not give you those luxuries to which you have so long been accustomed, we should even have to wait months before we were married—but I love you with an honest heart, and my love is all the stronger for being so long repressed. My darling, what will you say to me?"

Still she stood, her head averted as she thought of Mahala and her wild passion; must she hurt herself and perhaps spoil Duncan's life for her benefactress' sake? Presently she said,—

"Tell me, truly, is there any other woman you have ever loved, or given cause to believe you loved her?"

"On my honour, no. There is only one in the world for me, and I have found her in you. Valerie, sweetheart, is my house to be your home?"

As she veered round he saw her beautiful eyes were full of tears that had no element of unhappiness in them.

"I hope so," she said, very simply, "for I do love you with every heart throb."

He took her hands, and slowly drew her towards him; nearer and nearer yet, until his arm was about her waist, her head upon his shoulder, her lovely face upturned to receive the first holy kiss of love. But not a word did either speak for very long—each was thinking of Mahala and her probable anger, although neither would confess so much to the other; only as they passed down the quiet river, Duncan asked,—

"Will you tell Miss St. Mark, or shall I?"

"Let me, please; it would be discourteous if I failed to do so."

It was growing quite dusk when they reached Heronhay, but Valerie insisted that her lover should leave her at the gates.

"I am not afraid of the walk through the grounds," she said, "and—and—I would like to be quite alone with my happiness."

So he took her in his arms, kissing her again and again, murmuring such words of love and

tenderness as brought tears to her eyes, and humbled her proud, generous heart,—

"I am not worthy of you," she said, leaning against him, "but I will try to grow nearer the measure of your goodness."

She dined alone, and after a mere farce of eating went to the library thither to write to Mahala. It was a difficult task, knowing as she did her employer's passion for Duncan, and she wrote but slowly, touching little on her own happiness, expressing an earnest hope that Mahala's love had proved fleeting, and through all her words there rang the tone of sympathy, and regret that her's should have been the hand to pluck the prize the other coveted.

"But," she said, "he loves me, and his happiness is mine to make or mar; what answer could I give but yes? Forgive me if I have caused you pain, and do not scruple to say if you would prefer me to leave Heronhaye before you return. I shall not think harshly of one who has so long shown me kindness only."

She felt lighter of heart when her letter was despatched, and spent the next day in solitary happiness, Duncan being unable through press of business, to spend any time with her. That evening, as she sat reading, her letter was carried into Miss St. Mark, who was dressing for the opera. She turned it over and over in leisurely fashion, until the thought came to her that it might contain some news of Duncan.

"You can go, Ffifne," she said to her maid. "I can manage easily now, and Mrs. Spenser may require a little help," and the girl being gone, she tore open the envelope with fingers that trembled a little despite herself, her breath came faster from between her parted lips, and her bosom heaved with ill-concealed emotion. How beautiful she was, standing there in the subdued light of the lamps, her ruby silk gown, and glittering diamonds enhancing her every charm.

She did not look like a woman whose fate it was to know the pangs of "despised love."

As she read, her eyes dilated, the lusty red left her lips; her face grew suddenly white and distorted. With a wild gesture she flung her arms above her head.

"Oh, Heaven! she has won him! Not all my wealth, not all my beauty or my love have availed me anything!"

She crushed the half-read letter in her hand. She paced to and fro with a slow, sinuous measure which reminded one unpleasantly of a caged tiger. Then suddenly she fell to the floor, and lay grovelling there, whilst she hissed, through her clenched white teeth,—

"She has won him; but she shall not keep him! I will kill her first! He shall be mine. Little by little I will steal him from her, if he can be tempted from his allegiance. If not, I will remove her from my path, but how? how? Oh, Duncan! oh, my beloved! you have taken to yourself a heart of ice! and I—well, I am the worse woman for the lack of your love."

Ffifne, knocking, entered, exclaiming volubly as her eyes fell upon that huddled heap of lace, silks, and jewellery; but Mahala, lifting her head, bade her be silent.

"I am ill, but not seriously so. Please tell Mrs. Spenser not to mind me; she can go with Mrs. Dumayne."

Ffifne retired to do her bidding, and once more she was alone with her wrath, her wicked longings for revenge, for in Mahala St. Mark the poet's words, "Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned," were, alas! too cruelly true.

Presently Mrs. Spenser entered, declaring she did not care in the least to attend the opera without her.

Mahala flashed savagely upon her.

"Go! my will is law, and I wish to be alone! I am too ill for even your company to-night. No, I don't want a doctor, and I won't touch any remedy you may prescribe. 'Throw physic to the dogs,' and pray leave me."

"But, dear, it is so very heartless," began Mrs. Spenser, deprecatingly.

"You are my employé; your duty is to obey me! There, I did not mean to say that, only you angered me, and I am not quite myself. But in mercy to both, go, and I hope you will

have a good time. You may kiss me if you will. I believe you honestly love me—you, of all the world."

"I do; you know that I do! But, dear, let me ask you (pray don't be angry) has the letter you hold anything to do with your illness?"

"No, no; it contains a very pleasant surprise. I will tell you all about it to-morrow. Now leave me; I shall get to bed, and in the morning I shall be quite myself again. This indisposition is quite unwonted. You know I pride myself on my strength," and very reluctantly Mrs. Spenser was compelled to leave her.

She lay long brooding upon her wrongs; then, rising, she stripped off her dainty robes, her flashing jewels, flinging them contemptuously into a little heap, and when Ffifne came again she found her mistress, to all appearance, asleep.

All that night Mahala brooded over her imaginary wrongs, striving to see how to act so that Valerie and Duncan might be separated and she herself made happy.

"His wife she shall never be," she said, again and again, "even though I cannot win him to myself."

But for all her violence she had the true Hebraic caution; so in the morning she wrote to Valerie in kindest terms congratulating her upon her betrothal, and praising Duncan generously.

"Try to forget," she said, in conclusion, "that I ever dreamed I loved him; that chapter in my life is ended. I have seen my own folly and how utterly unsuitable such an alliance would have been. I shall return in a few days, when I shall probably have important news for you concerning myself."

Then she ordered out the carriage, and in reply to Mrs. Spenser's remonstrance,—

"My dear, you will not go out; it is a cold, wet morning, and you are looking ill. Let me transact your business for you, or at least go with you," she said, laughingly:

"Oh, nothing ails me; you are fanciful and, tired as you are, I will not think of dragging you from this comfortable place by the fire. The fact is, I want to get a trifling present for Valerie as a memento of her betrothal—did I not tell you of it?—oh, I suppose my foolish indisposition drove it from my mind. She is going to marry Duncan Moyse as soon as he can afford to take a wife. He has purchased the River House, and they propose to be as happy there as turtle doves. Of course it is not a brilliant match, but Mr. Moyse has talent, and will probably be successful."

"But," said Mrs. Spenser, timorously, "I used to think that—that you liked Mr. Moyse."

"Oh, I do, in the most friendly fashion; but when I marry—if ever I am so foolish—I shall marry my equal," and with a light laugh she went out, bidding the coachman drive to a somewhat obscure street in the vicinity of St. Stephen's.

They halted before a dingy-looking house of some four stories; above the second one was the inscription, "The Guaka Silver Mine Company," and asking for the manager she was admitted into the presence of Mr. Moss—otherwise Mr. Jacob Powell.

He uttered a glad exclamation as he saw who was his visitor, and stretched out his hand in cordial fashion; but she, ignoring it, sank into a chair, saying, languidly,—

"So I have unearthed you at last, Jacob; and now it is I who want your help."

CHAPTER IV.

"It is a great happiness to me to see you again, Mahala; and now how can I help you?"

She seemed to find some difficulty in beginning her story, for she glanced hesitatingly round her, and remarked in an indifferent way, "You seem to be prospering, Jacob; or are appearances deceitful? Does the Guaka mine actually exist?"

"Oh, I am doing very well—speak softly, please. The mine has its birth in my own imagination. A few fellows are in the swim with me, and we hope to make a good thing by it."

"If you're not careful you will burn your fingers again, Jacob."

"Not I; I am wiser than I was three years ago, my dear, and shall not wait for the big crash to come. Thanks to you, I have made a very good start this time, and am feathering my nest rapidly—but enough of my business; let us turn to yours. What is it you wish me to do? You know you have only to command!"

The hot blood rushed into her pale cheeks as she answered, "I want you, by fair means or foul, to remove Valerie Grant from my path—and remember that you must degrade her in the eyes of all who know her."

"That is a large order," he remarked callously. "How has the fair Valerie offended you?—has she any inkling of—"

"Be quiet, Jacob—no!—but—but—it cannot signify to you in what way she has incurred my displeasure—"

"I shall not act in the dark, Mahala; I want to know the facts of the case."

"Well," with a defiant flash in her eyes, although her face grew crimson with shame, "here they are. She has stolen the heart of the only man I ever have loved, or can love; and she must suffer."

Jacob Powell's features worked convulsively, but Mahala was too humiliated to look at him, and when he spoke his voice was perfectly even.

"I can't see how you hope to benefit yourself by stealing away Valerie's lover—who is he?"

"Duncan Moyse; don't you see, Jacob, that he is a very proud man, and if he could be persuaded that she had been guilty of some mean crime, he would at once renounce her."

"It does not follow that he would love or marry you."

"No," bitterly; "but it might chance so; despising her, he might naturally come to regard me as—as once he regarded her—"

"I remember Moyse; he did not strike me as a man of unstable affections or opinions. If he still held aloof, Mahala, what then?"

"Why I should have the satisfaction of knowing I had revenged my wrongs upon her, and that she would never be his wife! Only help me, Jacob, and I will give you anything you ask, even to the half of my fortune—think of it!—there would be no further need for you to run these bogus companies, risking your liberty, and going daily in fear—"

"I ask far less than you offer," he answered, quietly; "never mind what the boon is I crave, you shall know when Valerie Grant has fallen victim to your machinations. But you will sign a document to the effect that what I demand you will give?"

"Yes," she answered, with a hard laugh; "if you are pleased to be mysterious, that is your own concern. What are you doing now?"

"Drawing up the agreement; it is as well to have it in black and white," then he wrote rapidly for a few seconds; then he handed the paper to her, and she read—

"I, Mahala St. Mark, do hereby promise to give to Jacob Powell, whatever gift he shall demand of me, on the accomplishment of the plot we together have conspired to bring against Miss Valerie Grant's honour and peace. Failing to observe my vow, I willingly submit to any penalty he may choose to inflict."

"It is a curious paper," said Mahala, "and risky, both to you and me, but let me sign it; I am thirsty for revenge, and willing to pay any price;" with that she recklessly signed her name, and the office boy having duly witnessed it, the two conspirators were left to their own evil schemes.

Long they talked together, their voices lowered to a whisper, and when the woman rose, there was a look of unholy triumph on her face.

Restless and miserable beyond compare, she contrived to spend two days longer in town, then she said to Mrs. Spenser, "Let us go home. I am anxious to congratulate Valerie in person," and the chaperone who almost worshipped her, despite her faults and caprices, made no protest against so hurried a journey.

Consequently they arrived, jaded and weary at night, and Valerie walked through the marble-flagged hall, in some little trepidation, to meet them. But any uneasiness she might have felt

was quickly dispelled by Mahala's affectionate greeting.

"Dear girl, I should have liked to have been the very first one to wish you the joy you deserve, but although they are rather late, my congratulations are not the less sincere. And I want you to forget my foolish confession of a love which was as ephemeral as it was violent." Then she kissed the fair, sweet face, and they went together to her boudoir, where Valerie lingered long, listening to Mahala's stories of her lovers, and her very latest conquest, and not a thought of trouble dimmed the brightness of her confident's joy.

How should she guess that whilst she spoke so kindly, she was brooding over the plot Jacob Powell had unfolded to her?

With the morning Duncan arrived; Mahala met him first, and by a gesture invited him to enter the nearest reception-room; very reluctantly he obeyed, not so much as glancing at the imperial figure which now stood like a statue before him.

"I felt I must see you before you went to Valerie," she began, finding he would not break silence, "and it is as a suppliant that I stand here. Mr. Moysse, to my eternal shame, I remember my wild and unwomanly declaration of love to you. Will you assure me that it is known only to yourself and me?"

"I can honestly do that. I should, indeed, be a brute to breathe one word of it to any, although your love should be the crowning glory of some good fellow's life."

She, sighing, pressed her hands to her temples. "You will try not to esteem me less? If I had been English-born I might have been more conventional. I ask now for your silence. Oh, not so much for my sake as Valerie's. If she knew all she would, perhaps, believe that once you gave me ground to hope you cared for me. And not for worlds would I sow dissension between you. She will make you happier than I ever could, for wealth is a sorry thing after all; but because I loved you once, and—oh, forgive me!—shall love you till I die; let me give your bride some substantial token of my regard for her. I have more than enough for my needs, and there is no one to quarrel with me concerning the disposition of my property; because, now, I shall never marry."

"You have my promise of secrecy, although, indeed, that was never needed; and I hope with all my heart yet to see you a happy bride. For the rest, dear, I prefer to work for my wife. Hush! I hear her step along the hall."

"Then I will go, although I still hope to shake your resolve. Valerie, I have been congratulating Mr. Moysse (as Valerie entered), and I'm quite looking forward to the time when you will be settled at the River House, because then I shall have another pleasant place of resort open to me," and with that she slipped away.

Through all the golden summer days which followed she lavished such affection; such gifts upon the bride-elect, that Valerie's heart was full of tenderness towards her, and often she prayed that Mahala's life might be as glad as was the promise of her own; Duncan, too, forgot to be embarrassed when they met, and grew to regard the lady of Heronhay with an affectionate esteem he had never believed she could inspire. As September drew near she said,—

"We have spent so quiet a summer, Valerie, that I am resolved to make the coming season gay, especially as it is the last autumn we shall spend together," so she invited a party of her recently-acquired friends to come down to Heronhay for the shooting, promising the best of sport, and in a few days the Hall was full.

A fortnight passed, and the men were well satisfied with the sport, for the game was well preserved. The ladies declared they had never spent so delightful a time, for what with tennis, taking out lunch to the men, *tableaux vivants*, and unceremonious dances in the evening, Mahala contrived to occupy every minute of their days.

But at the close of the fortnight she came down to breakfast with a very serious face, and was so abstracted that one of her numerous admirers ventured to ask what had gone wrong.

She paused a moment, as though weighing well her words, then she said, slowly,—

"I do not know if I ought to tell you my trouble; but it will be some relief to me to do so. The fact is I have been robbed!"

"Robbed!" echoed Mrs. Spenser in alarm. "My dear Mahala, you must be mistaken! What is it that you miss?"

Miss St. Mark turned to Valerie.

"Dear," she said, "you remember that three nights ago I showed you five diamonds which had become loosened, and finally fallen from the Heronhay necklace? You told me then to be careful with them, and I was, for I locked them away in the safe in the library with my own hands, together with a note for two hundred pounds. Both stones and note are gone."

"I remember the circumstance perfectly, Mahala; but, surely, in your haste you must have overlooked them."

"I wish I could think so; shall we go through the contents of the safe together? You are more careful than I; but if we do not find them I must telegraph to Scotland-yard."

An uncomfortable impression was left upon all gathered at the breakfast-table, and it was certainly not decreased when later in the morning Valerie announced that the gems and note had certainly been abstracted from the safe; it was all the more curious because the servants were old and trusty.

But a close examination of the library windows proved conclusively that they had not been tampered with, and finally, Mahala despatched her message to Scotland-yard.

By night Detective Marsh arrived at Heronhay Hall, and after a long interview with the hostess, appeared before the guests in the drawing-room.

He was middle-aged, spare, and had eyes like a ferret; but his manner was childlike and bland as he said,—

"I presume ladies and gentlemen there is no one present who will not make over their keys to me. It is a mere matter of form; but I must begin operations by searching every trunk, portmanteau, and possible hiding-place in the house."

No one demurred, but when Valerie's turn came she detached a small key from her bunch before handing it to Marsh. The ferret eyes flashed.

"I beg your pardon, miss; but I must have all!"

Valerie, looking intently at him, answered,—

"I will not give this up, save under compulsion; it is the key of my desk which contains nothing but a few private papers."

Duncan, who was present, knew that she referred to his brief notes, which were too sacred for other eyes to read, but one or two of the guests exchanged curious glances.

"I am sorry to seem discourteous, but I must insist upon the possession of the key; I will disturb your belongings as little as possible."

"I am afraid, dear," Mahala broke in gently, "that you have no choice in this matter at all; and really it is only a form; no one present is suspected; but Mr. Marsh must pursue his own tactics without interference or opposition."

Very reluctantly Valerie handed the key to the detective who asked Mahala to accompany him in his search. She shook her head,—

"Please no, Mrs. Spenser will kindly be my substitute, this is very painful to me."

An hour passed by; overhead they frequently heard the click, clack, of the chaperone's high-heeled slippers, the heavy tread of the detective, and at last to the relief of all, the two returned to the drawing-room. Mrs. Spenser was white and troubled looking, the detective wore his usual imperturbable expression. Advancing to a little table he placed upon it five glittering stones and a crisp bank of England note.

"Oh!" cried Mahala, with a gasp of relief, "You have found them? What a deal of unnecessary trouble I have given—of course they were in some place where I had hidden them for safety. I am most forgetful."

Mrs. Spenser did not speak, but Marsh made answer,—

"I cannot think you would hide them in another lady's desk; Miss Grant, these were discovered in yours!"

Dead silence followed, then Duncan, starting to his feet, cried hotly,—

"It is a foul lie, there is no one here 'will credit it,' but the half-averted faces, the unnatural stillness gave the lie to his words. 'Valerie!' he said, touching her, 'Valerie, this is either a terrible mistake or a cruel conspiracy, but no one believes you guilty. Speak clear, in your own defence.'"

She was very white but very calm as she rose,—

"Mahala," she said, "you do not believe me guilty?"

"Oh, why! why! did you withhold that one key?"

Valerie's great dark eyes met her's in amazement; her lips quivered, and her face was white as death as she questioned,—

"Do you believe I could stoop to so low a crime as theft? You must either denounce or clear me—this charge shall not go unproven."

Mahala covered her eyes with her hands.

"Oh, Valerie, Valerie! why do you force me to speak?—Why, if you needed money, did you not apply to me?"

"You mean, madam," almost shouted Duncan, "that you brand my promised wife as a thief. It is a foul lie," then someone touching his arm, said,—

"For Miss Grant's sake keep quiet. You will only injure her cause by your violence," and when he felt the girl he loved leaning upon him for support, heard her whisper,—

"Tell me, oh, tell me, Duncan, you do not believe this!" he strove for her sake to be calm, whilst he answered,—

"I would believe you against all the world my beloved."

Then came Marsh's voice,—

"Do you prosecute, Miss St. Mark?"

"On principle I must," answered Mahala, with her face still hidden. "Oh, Valerie! Valerie! how could you so wrong me? I who have loved and cherished you as a sister. Officer, take her away, I cannot look on her again."

There was a stifled murmur; Valerie Grant had shamefully betrayed her friend's trust, but she was young, beautiful, high-born, and it seemed almost incredible that the law should wreak its vengeance upon her. Mahala only said,—

"Take her away."

Then Valerie looked up; she had never been more proud, more beautiful,—

"I will go," so fell the steady words, "there is no need for force; please do not handoff me. I shall not be violent. Mahala, you know that I am wrongfully accused; but who is my enemy is not yet clear to me."

"You shall not go a prisoner, and a martyr," cried Duncan, "only over my dead body shall you be taken."

Before them all, she, the proud, reticent Valerie, put her arms about his neck, turning her face, all glowing with love, upon them,—

"You will let me go, if only to establish my innocence; and I go strong in the knowledge of your love and faith. Those of you who most suspect me now, will one day remember your distrust and be sorry. Mahala, good-bye whether I am proclaimed guilty or not, we can never again meet on the old footing."

She went to Marsh then.

"I am ready," she said, simply, and Duncan went with them to the door. There he kissed her upon the mouth.

"You may come no further," she said, as she leaned from the carriage, "Good-bye. Heaven bless you!" and so like an outraged queen she went from Heronhay.

CHAPTER V.

VALERIE'S case made a great commotion through the county, and folks were considerably divided in their opinions concerning her. There were those who declared it impossible for her to be guilty, whilst there were others who believed her crime proved, but said that, considering all the circumstances of the case, Miss St. Mark should have declined to prosecute. She had

won Val-rie's inheritance from her, and surely she could have borne so trivial a loss as hers without creating a scandal.

Valerie did not ask or wish for bail.

"I could not endure the curious looks of those who know me," she said to her solicitor, and so she lay in Brenton gaol until the Quarter Sessions. She was very calm and self-contained; so conscious of her innocence she felt no fear that it would not be triumphantly established, and even met Duncan, when he visited her, with a smile.

"I am not unconscious of the shame of my present position," she said, "but I have no fear. If you had believed me guilty I should be less brave. Have you learned anything fresh?"

"Nothing," he answered, heavily. "Valerie, have you no idea as to the guilty one's identity?"

She shook her head.

"No; I never knew I had an enemy; but do not worry overmuch, it will all be made clear presently."

"And if not," she said, as he held her close—she looked fully into his eyes—"if not, then remember that you are absolutely free."

"No; however the world may judge you I shall keep perfect faith in your innocence, my beloved, and I will not release you from your promise."

Tears shone in her beautiful eyes as she lifted them to his.

"Please Heaven you shall never be subjected to such a test. Dear, if I am found guilty (remember I cannot believe such a thing possible) I will never seek shelter under your name; I will never drag you down to such a level; ruining your life, blighting your hopes, killing your ambition." There, I have made you sad, and that was not my intention." Then, lowering her voice to the faintest whisper, "If it affords you any comfort; remember that I love you, with all my soul, with all my strength; and so I shall love you until I die."

And now the day of trial came, and the courthouse was crowded to suffocation.

Great sympathy was felt with Duncan Meyse, who was present, looking very haggard and anxious.

The first three cases were quickly disposed of, and then Valerie was brought in. She was paler than usual, but her eyes were clear and steady; her face had not lost one jot or tittle of its old proud expression, but a faint flush crept over it as she met Duncan's anxious, loving regard. She declined to be seated, and there she stood in the dock, beautiful and calm, "with the boldness of an old sinner," as one unfavourable to her cause whispered to a neighbour.

Witness after witness appeared, and, alas! there was none to give evidence in behalf of the prisoner. Then Mahala was called. She was agitated and distressed, but gave her evidence clearly, if reluctantly.

Miss Grant was her paid companion, and was on the eve of marriage with an honourable gentleman. She had nothing but her salary, and she (Mahala) could only believe that in her wish to assist in providing a home she had yielded to sudden and fierce temptation. She desired that the court would treat defendant with all possible leniency. Nothing but the heavy responsibilities laid upon her would have induced her to bring the case for trial.

As every fresh witness disappeared, Duncan's face showed more plainly the fear possessing him, and it now became clear to Valerie that it would be far from an easy matter to establish her innocence.

It was as though an icy hand gripped her heart, and life grew faint in her. With an overwhelming sense of agony and defeat she lifted her eyes to her lover's. Thank Heaven, they only spoke of love, and a little heartened she waited for the end.

The jury did not retire. Clear and sharp came the verdict, "Guilty," followed by a recommendation to mercy.

Valerie started as though she had been struck, and something like a sob broke from her lips, and yet so great was her pride and strength that even then she did not break down, but waited rigidly to hear her sentence.

"Nine months' imprisonment with hard labour!"

There was so profound a silence in court that one might almost hear the falling of a pin.

Duncan's head had drooped forward so that his face was hidden.

The prisoner stayed a little, and seemed about to fall. Then her white hands went slowly up to her temples, and in her uplifted eyes there was a very agony of shame and despair. Those who looked feared that she would faint, and more than one woman wept.

The warder touched her respectfully. She started as though she had been stung; then, gathering all her failing courage for one last effort, she stepped from the dock, and disdaining all assistance walked out of the court with a steady step.

Outside, those who could not force an entrance were waiting to learn the verdict, and amongst the poor of Heronhays there was some amount of hissing when it was announced.

Presently Mahala appeared, and stepping into her carriage gave the order, "Home."

A girl amongst the rabble stooping, picked up a stone, and with the very emphatic words, "You beast!" hurled it at her. It struck her upon the right cheek, and the offender was promptly captured by an officious policeman, who dragged her towards the carriage to receive its occupant's instructions.

Mahala was very white as she asked,—

"Why did you do that? Have I ever hurt you in any way?"

The girl, an unkempt, precocious creature of fourteen, glared at her from under a tangle of sandy hair.

"No; but you've hurt her; an' I wish I'd killed yer, I do."

"Let her go," said Mahala wearily, "Miss Grant was good to her people," and then she drove off amidst the murmurs of the crowd, whilst the officer administered a sharp reproof to the culprit, who met it with the words,—

"She's a sneak an' a thief herself—that's wot she is; she's got all the old man's money, an' now she's gone an' got Miss Vallery locked up; an' I don't care who hears me say it, she knows better nor any on us who put them diamonds where they was found."

And she was not alone in her belief. As she walked away sobbing (for Valerie had indeed been good to her and hers), Duncan was in her wake; he had heard her words, and they had given birth to new suspicions in his mind. As they left the town he, quickening his steps overtook her, and touching her shoulder, asked,—

"What is your name?"

"Wot's that to yer?" she demanded, then recognizing him, said, "Oh, I thought it was a copper come after me, for chucking a stone at her; my name's Jane Garner, and I live close by the Hall. It ain't much of a place mister, but madam up at the house won't do nothin' to better it."

"Why did you throw that stone?" interrupted Duncan.

"Cos she'd been and got Miss Vallery locked up all for nothin'!"

"Then you don't believe Miss Valerie took the diamonds?"

"Lord, no! I do yer? Wot I believes is that madam put 'em where they was found herself. Oh, she's a deep un, my mother says."

"Would you do anything to prove Miss Valerie innocent, Jane?"

"Wouldn't I! Jest yer try me. Why look here, mister, when my dad was out o' work and mother ill, Miss Vallery come up to turn every day an' talked that there comfortin' yer can't tell, an' she never left us to starve, though she ain't rich, like madam! Wot do yer want me to do?"

"I am a very busy man, Jane, and have no time to watch Miss St. Mark's actions; will you do it for me? You know what a detective is?"

"Rather; he's a feller wot spies on other folks; do yer want me to play detective?"

"Yes, for Miss Grant's sake; be careful and industrious, and I will pay you well; anything you learn tell me; come to the River House after dark."

"Alright, mister; but I don't want nothin' for the job; I'll do it for love o' Miss Vallery. I wish I'd ha' killed madam to-day—only it t'wouldn't ha' done the other one no good; so p'raps its best. Well, this is my way; good day, mister, an' good luck to me!"

With these parting words, Jane Garner, forlorn, unkempt, but loyal of heart, bent of purpose, made her way to her squalid home; and Duncan went heavily towards River House. The dreary night soon fell; but how could he rest, remembering Valerie's plight? That beautiful proud head brought low; that lovely lisson form wearing the hateful badge of shame; she, the pure and high-born consorting with lost women, doomed to degrading tasks; her tender hands all torn and roughened by the bitter, unaccustomed toil? Was there any shame to him that, bowing his face upon his arms, he wept the awful tears of manhood.

"Valerie! Valerie!" he cried in the bitterness of his soul; this is worse than death to you, my love, my darling; would to Heaven I could suffer in your stead.

And alone in her cell lay Valerie, wakeful and too wretched for tears.

"I can never lift my head again," she said in her wrung heart. "I can never now take comfort in his love, or wear his name! Good-bye, my dearest heart, good-bye; not as a guilty woman can I come to you; my life is over and done with. Heaven is very cruel. Oh! that I could die to-night, and so end my terrible story."

But life was strong within her; in the morning she rose, and with proud submission donning the prison garb, listened patiently but boldly to the instructions given concerning her duties; all day long she toiled with bleeding fingers and aching limbs; with heart half-broken and spirit almost crushed. The morrow was Sunday, and she with the other prisoners attended divine service, but found no consolation in it, and when the chaplain visited her cell, she listened to him with the same hard composure, until he urged her to confess her crime, and by confessing win peace. Then her dark eyes flashed,—

"How dare you address me in such language, I, who am your equal by birth and education, and as innocent of the thing laid to my charge as the youngest child that breathes?"

"Are you innocent?" he questioned, for alas! experience had made him sceptical, and often guilt wears the look of innocence.

She confronted him proudly.

"I have given my word. Now leave me if you please, and do not touch upon my story again."

That was ever her bearing; she never complained, although there were days when she could scarcely move without keenest pain; but she would not exchange speech with any save under compulsion, and when the chaplain came and went she heard him in proud silence, for her heart was in hot revolt against Heaven and man.

And all the while Jane Garner was working and watching on her behalf; and Duncan was almost mad with grief for her, and despair; that all his efforts to prove her innocence, and bring home the guilt to the true offender were so far in vain.

In this way a month went by, and slowly Valerie's beauty was slipping from her; her eyes looked preternaturally large for her wasted face; her beautiful hair was gone, nothing remaining of its glory save a crop of very close-kept curls, and her poor hands bore no resemblance to the dainty beringed members Duncan had been prone to kiss.

"I shall not live to serve my time," she thought, with savage exultation; but when the chaplain questioned her pitifully as to her health, she answered curtly, "I am well," and would say no more.

There was nothing she so much longed for as death; she had lost all hope, and she thought with fear of the time when she should be released; where then could she hide herself? The earth had no resting-place for her. And when she thought of Mahala she set her lips in a hard line, because deep in her heart was the conviction that Mahala herself had placed the stolen property in her desk, and almost she hated her. Was there any wonder that it should be so?

On a dreary October evening, Duncan sat alone, trying vainly to interest himself in the business before him, but thinking of Valerie and Mahala—he had met the latter only that very day, and she had resolutely forced him to stay and exchange speech with her.

"Why do you avoid me so markedly?" she asked, in a low voice; "am I to suffer for her sin? Am I to lose the friendship you promised?"

"Do you suppose I can ever see or ever remember you," he retorted quickly, "without recalling the shame and misery you have brought upon my promised wife?"

"She was guilty; the law but took its course."

"Who set that law in motion? And I deny her guilt—even if I could for an instant admit it, I should find no excuse in it for your conduct; you might have spared her ignominy, but you preferred to heap it upon her, and I have not far to look for your motive."

She drew herself up proudly. "You are misjudging me as others have done; I could not have saved Valerie from shame if I would; remember Marsh made his statement in the presence of my guests; you could not impose silence upon them; better she should stand her trial and prove her innocence, as even to the last I hoped she would. You are treating me very unfairly—I who would give half my fortune only to have Valerie—as I believed her—back with us again."

"I am not credulous," he had answered, as he turned on his heel, leaving her in the open way, all unconscious of a pair of keen brown eyes watching her every look and movement. With a passionate gesture she stretched out her hands as though in supplication to him, moaning out his name coupled with many an endearing term, until Jane Gurner, crouching among the bushes, had hard work to suppress her laughter—for Jane had no compassion upon Miss St. Mark, and was distinctly not sentimental. Following always at a safe distance, she kept the lady in view until almost the gates of Heronhay were reached; and then something happened which made her eyes glisten with triumph, but being a wise young person, she waited until Miss St. Mark had passed into the grounds, before pouncing upon the paper she had inadvertently drawn from her pocket.

She did not know if she had found a prize or not. She was totally ignorant of the art of reading, and so she determined to carry it to the River House as soon as night fell.

So as Duncan sat brooding alone, he was startled by a shabby little apparition in the doorway, and a voice which said—

"If you please the woman wot waits on yer said I was to come in here; I found this to-day, she dropped it, and I thought as how it might mean somethin';" with which she tendered him Mahala's lost letter.

He hesitated a moment, and then reflecting that it was for Valerie's sake, he drew it from the envelope and read.

DEAR MAHALA,

I shall come down to claim my reward, which, by the terms of our agreement, you must grant. I have already waited long enough for it, and you will not be so foolish as to refuse it. I have helped you to remove your enemy from your way, and the labourer is worthy of his hire. If you do not meet me at the old spot, to-morrow, on receipt of a message, I shall come to the house. I have really nothing to fear but, perhaps, you would prefer I should not be recognised.

Your most affectionate cousin,

JACOB POWELL.

The blood mounted to Duncan's brow. "This letter is of value to Miss St. Mark," he said, quietly, "I will return it to her to-morrow. Now ask Mrs. Blake to give you supper, and then hurry home."

CHAPTER VI.

Left alone, Duncan brooded long over the open letter; "Jacob Powell," the nameseemed familiar; and presently he remembered that a lawyer of that name had drawn up Augustus Heronhayes last will and testament. He had been

from Heronhay at the time, and knew very little of the real state of affairs, learning from gossip only what had befallen Miss Grant.

Now he discovered that the said lawyer was Mahala's cousin, and evidently her colleague; could he possibly refer to Valerie as the enemy removed from her path? Had there been a diabolical plot against her of their conniving? That was the only solution to the mystery; and the man wrote as one who is conscious of his own power.

Duncan set his teeth hard and his face blanched; if Mahala had so foully wronged his darling he would stay at nothing to avenge her wrongs.

Then he rose suddenly, and going to a file of old papers, drew out one dated just two months after Heronhayes's death; with a rapid finger he ran down the columns until he came to a paragraph headed 'Betrayal of Trust.' It contained the story of a lawyer who had misappropriated trust monies, been struck off the rolls, and been sentenced to three years' penal servitude. The name of the lawyer was Jacob Powell.

What bond of sin and fraud held Mahala in his power?

In the morning he was compelled to go to town; and but resolving to see her on the morrow he locked away the letter, and with new hope in his heart, and a more cheerful face than he had worn for many a weary day; he was perfectly sure, too, that in his absence Jane would not relax her vigilance, and his confidence was not misplaced.

Watching throughout the day this poor little offspring of down-trodden, poverty-stricken parents saw Miss St. Mark steal from an old and seldom-used passage into the fast-gathering night, and following, witnessed her meeting with a man whose face she could not see. But she heard Mahala's voice, sharp and angry question,—

"Why do you send such ridiculous messages, Jacob? Why cannot you behave like a respectable creature? What reward do you want?"

"You have no need to ask!" he retorted, sullenly, "there is only one that I will take from you, that is your hand!"

Mahala stood silent an instant, then she laughed out, shrilly,—

"You are pleased to be facetious (Jane did not understand what she meant; but she guessed from her tone that she was angry), but I am not in the mood for jesting. Tell me the price of your services, and let me go, I have friends to entertain."

"That is your normal condition, Mahala; but for once you must consider me first. I will be heard. Dearest, I love you. I ask only that you will be wife. I have made a pretty pile in the last few months; and in some other country with you to help me, I should become a prosperous and respectable citizen. I will accept nothing from you but this dear hand (he tried to take it in his own clammy grasp). "Mahala, for your own sake be merciful to me."

"Are you mad?" she demanded, angrily. "Did I not tell you that there was only one man in the whole world for me? Well, hear me when I say that if I do not wear Duncan Moyse's name I will go to my grave as Mahala St. Mark; for I love him with all my soul, and I will stay at nothing to win him."

"What was that?" asked Powell, nervously, as Jane laughed aloud.

"Nothing; what a coward you are! But, see Jacob, you have helped me often in my life, and if I cannot give you what you ask I can at least give you what you love—gold!—plenty of it—and you love it as your soul."

"I love you more," he said, sullenly, "Mahala, will you marry me?"

"I will not. Why do you vex yourself and me with such foolish persistency? Take the gifts the gods offer, and be content."

His face changed and darkened.

"I give you one last chance, you will do well to take it. Is it yes or no?"

"No."

"Then take the consequences. You have broken your contract. I no longer consider mine binding; for whatever follows you have but to blame yourself. I would have been merciful.

I have been patient, but a worm will turn, Mahala."

"Just so! If you have finished your homily you had best go; send me word in the morning what is the price of your silence and final disappearance from my life, and you shall have it."

With a slight shrug of her shoulders she left him, and he stood looking after her with eyes full of anger, love, and the lust for revenge. With a dreadful curse he said,—

"You have gone too far this time, and the time for mercy is over—an eye for an eye shall henceforth be my motto—perhaps in your ruin you will be glad to turn to me."

"Well, here's a rum go!" said Jane, stepping into the open, as Jacob Powell disappeared. "Oh, madam, ain't yer goin' to catch it! an' serve yer right." Then she made her way to the River House, where she told her story briefly, but in a highly dramatic style, and being rewarded with half-a-crown went home to sleep the sleep of the just.

In the morning Duncan walked to the Hall. The ladies were at breakfast, but Miss St. Mark insisted that Mr. Moyse should waive all ceremony, and he was consequently conducted into her presence.

Beside Mrs. Spenser there were present a young medical man and two girls belonging to county families.

They looked surprised at the architect's early and informal visit; but Mahala rising, greeted him cordially, although her heart failed her when she saw how stern were his eyes, and how resolute the set of his massive jaw. Refusing to take her hand he said, quietly,—

"I wished to see you alone, Miss St. Mark. My business is of a strictly private nature."

"Oh, all are friends here. I suppose you have called with reference to the new observatory—by the way I thought you had entirely forgotten it—it is natural that my affairs should quite slip the memory of so busy a man as yourself. Join us at table, and let me give you a cup of Mrs. Spenser's excellent coffee, afterwards we will talk business."

He remained standing.

"Thank you I have breakfasted; and I must decline to undertake any further commission for you, Miss Mark. I called simply to restore your lost property. When you have leisure I have something to say to you with regard to it; and here he tendered her Jacob's letter.

Every vestige of colour left her face, her eyes grew wild with terror.

"I—I—there is some misunderstanding," she stammered. "Mr. Moyse, I will see you, come to the library, and now—"

A voice in the hall was heard, saying,—

"I will see your mistress. Out of my way, fellow! It is for her good I am here!"

With her hands thrown wildly before her, Mahala cried,—

"Keep him away! Oh, for the love of Heaven keep him away!"

But already Jacob Powell was in the room, his face flushed, and his bloodshot eyes eager with love and something akin to revenge.

Mahala fell against the wall, covering her face with her hands, shuddering convulsively as she felt him draw nearer and nearer yet.

"I have come for my answer, cousin," he said, huskily; "is it 'Yes' or 'No'? Be a sensible girl, and do as I wish. Remember, I have your written word, and this time I exact my pound of flesh."

Her hands dropped to her sides; her great eyes flashed defiance at him even through all their misery.

"It is no; now you must do your worst! I have come to the end of my tether. I have fought bravely, but the odds are too many for me."

"Take time for thought. Will you marry me, Mahala?"

"I will die first!"

He veered quickly round upon the astonished group.

"She has chosen, and if she has blighted her own life she can only blame herself. Ladies and gentlemen, in Miss St. Mark you see the Heronhayes thief. It was she who stole the diamonds and note, placing them in Miss Grant's desk."

"Great Heaven!" shouted Duncan, advancing. "Is this the truth? Fellow! I will know all now," and he gripped Jacob by the throat in the most unpleasant fashion.

"Take—your—hands off. Let me speak. I shall not spare her now," with a menacing glance at Mahala, who leaned panting against the wall, conscious all the while of the loathing on the faces of her guests. "She loved you, and vowed to be revenged upon Valerie Grant for winning you from her. On the news of your betrothal she came to me offering large rewards if I would help her to compass her rival's ruin. There was nothing I would not do for Mahala—my cousin—but I refused the bribe she offered, exacting only this written promise from her. She has failed to keep it, and I no longer will consent to be cheated of my dues. Read for yourselves, and see if I lie," thrusting that condemning document before them.

"There is no need," said Mahala, with a bitter laugh; "it is true."

"You devil!" The words broke involuntarily from Duncan. "I wish to Heaven that you were a man, then you should receive the punishment due for such a foul offence. Back, do not touch me, lest I forget your sex and strike you."

A groan lifted the white throat; a spasm of agony contracted the beautiful face. Then she stood erect.

"I have never been a coward," she said, proudly; "I will not show the white feather now. I have no hope of any good to come, so I dare the worst. Finish your work, Jacob Powell. Go back four years and make plain your first offence and mine."

"For your own sake, no, Mahala; I have had my revenge. Perhaps already I regret it. I will bear no further testimony against you."

"Then let me testify against myself. 'Be quiet! I will speak once and for all. Valerie Grant is the rightful owner of Heronhay, and I am but a usurper. I crave your silence a few minutes. Out of charity and a feeling of gratitude Augustus Heronhay received me into his home on my father's decease. I had known the extremity of poverty. I had even occasionally gone hungry, and I loved the luxury which now surrounds me. I set to work to make it mine securely. Augustus Heronhay was a dotard and like wax in my hands; I taught him soon to regard me with such affection as he was capable of, and finally he crowned his folly by asking me to become his wife. Even then, turning her dark eyes upon Duncan, 'even then I knew and loved you, so that marriage with any other was hateful to me, and I temporized with him. I extorted a promise of secrecy from him regarding our betrothal until at least six months had gone by. I don't know what I hoped would occur during this reprieve; I only know I was resolved to possess myself of the wealth I coveted, and not by marrying its owner. In his senile passion for me he had agreed to take his affairs out of the family lawyer's hands and place them in those of Jacob Powell—that man, my cousin. We did not find it a hard matter to coax him into making a will in my favour, and when shortly after he fell ill I believed that my future was secure. But as death drew near he had scruples of conscience about leaving Valerie Grant wholly unprotected for, and insisted upon dictating another. By this she became mistress of Heronhay, and I the possessor of a poor annuity. I made no protest; I was too wise; but together Jacob and I drew up a document which we substituted for the original, and this Augustus Heronhay signed in the fixed belief that he had nobly fulfilled his duty. Six hours later he died, and I entered upon my own. Mr. Powell disappeared, and being extravagant, quickly dissipated the reward he received in return for his services. Then he got into trouble, and for three years lived in Her Majesty's keeping. I wish he had died in it!" with a malignant glance at the shrinking traitor; "it would have been better for him and for me. Now, Duncan, you have heard my confession, what do you intend to do?"

"You had no mercy on your victim; I shall accord you none."

"Thank you; it is best we should understand

each other clearly. I am not sorry for anything I have done; I only regret that I used so poor a tool as that man. I have had my day and it is over. If you had loved me I should have been a better woman; but I see now there was never any hope of that. As I have lived free and defiant so I will die. No man shall say that Mahala St. Mark was a coward at the last; but I will stand before neither judge nor jury. Duncan, good-bye;" and then, before anyone could cry out or prevent her, this strange and dreadful woman, catching up a table knife, drove it with terrible force straight to her heart, and without so much as a sigh or groan, fell dead at the architect's feet.

In the horror and confusion which ensued, Mr. Jacob Powell effected his escape; nor was he ever seen again by any of the witnesses of Mahala's awful deed; and all were too anxious to forget the scene to make any enquiries for him, so that he went unpunished and probably prospers mightily in some distant country.

Mahala they buried in unconsecrated ground, without rite or ceremony, and no one, save Mrs. Spenser, ever visited that dishonoured grave. She, poor soul, said, sobbing,—

"She was always good to me, and though I hate her sins I cannot hate her memory. I would willingly have died to save her from such an awful death."

But no human power could help her now, and never any more could the dark eyes wake to the glory of a new day; the passionate heart was stilled for ever, and she slept the long, long sleep which no dreams can disturb, no loving voices break.

Of her tragic end, of the establishment of her own innocence, Valerie Grant was kept ignorant until the necessary formalities for her release had been gone through. Then Her Majesty being graciously pleased to pardon the crime she never had committed, Duncan went to her. He was inexpressibly shocked at the change in her; for although she would not confess it, she was really ill, and her white face, her hollow eyes and listless attitude, went far to break down Duncan's composure.

She was leaning with her head against the wall, her poor roughened hands loosely clasped before her; she never turned her head as the heavy door swung open, having no hope of any visitor save an official. But when Duncan spoke her name in accents of tenderest love and pity, she started up with a terrible scream,—

"Duncan! Duncan! am I dreaming? am I mad? Oh, Heaven; I must be mad;" and but that he caught her in his arms she must have fallen.

"My beloved! my beloved! it is I—in the flesh; and I have come to take you from this dreadful place. All is known; those who doubted you doubt you no longer. When you return to Heronhay it is as a free and honoured woman!"

But he spoke to deaf ears; Valerie had fainted; and long she lay in a heavy swoon; but at last her dear eyes opened upon his face, and her trembling hands went up to meet about his neck.

"Tell it me again; say over and over that my name is cleared; let me touch you that I may know you are not a dream. Duncan! Duncan! where will you take me; I cannot go back to Mahala!"

"Mahala is not at Heronhay," and something in his voice startled her.

"Where is she?" she questioned, and he was then compelled to tell her all the story; she clung shudderingly to him, and then when he had ended, said, under her breath,

"Poor, unhappy Mahala—I hated her bitterly—but I can forgive her now—Duncan, take me home; I am very weak and tired."

But another ordeal awaited her; the Heronhay carriage had been recognized by the good folks of Brenton, and many of the Heronhay peasants and county notoriety, having heard of the coming release, had flocked to the town to do her honour.

As she issued from the gates, leaning heavily upon her lover, a mighty cheer greeted her;

a ragged child thrust a bouquet of white chrysanthemums into her hand (that was Jane Gurner), and so many pressed around her, that she halted, bewildered and afraid.

"Stand back," said a constable, "the lady is ill," and room was made for her to pass.

But when she had entered the carriage, the public enthusiasm could no longer be checked. The horses were taken out, and in triumph Valerie Grant was borne back to the home she had left in shame and sorrow. But she knew little of this, for the second time in her life she had fainted.

When the Hall was reached, and the panting men at last could rest from their labour, Duncan stepped out, and lifting her in his arms, paused a moment to say a few well-chosen words of thanks, and beg them to go away, as Miss Grant was too ill for any further excitement.

Quietly the crowd dispersed, the long retinue of carriages bowled away, and silence fell all around and about the Hall.

Valerie lay ill for many weeks; the terrible trial she had undergone had sapped her strength and preyed so cruelly upon her mind, that at times it was feared she must die.

But with the close of the old year she rallied, and on New Year's Eve they brought her downstairs, frail it is true, but with radiant eyes and love-lit face.

Well, they were married; but first, Valerie in her generosity, provided amply for Mrs. Spenser's future. The poor lady could not endure to remain at Heronhay, and so returned to her friends, her annuity being a pleasant addition to their small income. And the Gurners were not forgotten in the general happiness and prosperity. Valerie installed Jane's father as lodge keeper in the pretty cottage which had always been his ideal of a home, nor did she repent her choice. Jane, too, was taken into her service, and now, when years of arduous labour have resulted in fame to Duncan, when the merry voices of children make music in Valerie's happy home, you would find it difficult to discover a more faithful nurse than the now comely Jane, who is presently to become the wife of the head gardener on the Heronhay Estates.

[THE END.]

A BRAVE HEART.

—30—

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEAM had been lost in her own troubled thoughts for so long she had forgotten the length of time she had sat alone in her nook. She heard the mass of the amateurs return to the hall and the stage in a dazed, dim sort of way. The laughter and buzz of conversation only reached her through a cloud, as it were. She was still unnoticed. The corner she had chosen was a long way down the hall, and was in semi-darkness owing to the heavy curtains that draped the window.

Not even when the piano was struck and the rehearsal appeared to be started in earnest again did Leam wake from her thoughts. It was left for Basil's voice, clear and grave, and with that new sound in it that had caught Dr. Wyllie's attention so quickly to pierce through the haze that her concentration had produced, and sent her blood leaping to her heart and her pulses thrilling as at some distinct and painful shock.

The news Basil had to give came at an inopportune moment to all the young people gathered together in his house to make merriment for themselves and others. To Leam it was more than unexpected. She had begun to count on the fact of Justina's tied existence as on the one, the only powerful and helpful aid to her schemes for the future. All her thought of success and all her thought of mortification for this other girl had been based on this fact. She had not known exactly how it was to be brought about, but she had counted none the less on the existence of Justina's husband as the pivot on which the machinery of her triumph was to turn.

It was foolish of her, no doubt, but the thought of Rupert Seaton's death had never entered into her calculations. She had reckoned on the circumstance of his dishonour. She had counted up all the points she could score with the knowledge she had gathered from the man St. Leger of the base life this husband of Justina's lived. She had begun to picture the work she would do so easily with these materials to her hand; but she had never once let herself imagine what would be a certainty if anything were to happen to Rupert Seaton to take him out of his wife's path out of the way to her happiness.

Now this fact had come, and come at a moment when Leam was more than unprepared for it. She could not recover from the blow. She shrank back into her corner, her face white to the lips, her strong hands trembling as with ague. Her heart itself seemed to cease beating. She had never experienced such a moment of weakness before in all her proud, self-reliant life. She heard Basil go away, and the hum of disappointed and disconsolate voices break forth after his departure. She made no effort to move. She determined to wait till the others had gone before she emerged from her hiding-place. She said to herself fiercely she would have no comment on her changed manner or appearance, and for all her pride and strength she had not the nerve to pull herself together into her old self just for the moment. She had not broken her fast since the morning; she was not hungry, only she felt strangely weak and oppressed. No sort of hope sprang forth to give her any help or comfort. She sat staring into the future with her big dark eyes, and look whichever way she might she saw nothing but the one same picture—the picture of Justina as Basil Fothergill's wife—lovely, happy, smiling, adored.

Leam shivered at this vision of her mind confronted her at every turn. She had not known till this moment how much a part of her life had her hope, her determination to win Basil Fothergill grown to be.

Love in its truest, its purest, its most beautiful meaning had never dawned in Leam's heart. It was not possible for such a nature to comprehend the real significance of love; but such love as she could know and could give she realised now she had known for and given to this man whom Justina Seaton would now call husband.

Soft emotions, tender thoughts, gentleness, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, these were things that could never come to Leam Greatorex. Her nature was built of other material. She was born to be a ruler over many, not the treasure of one heart. Still, for all her hardness she was not devoid of enough womanliness to be subject to the influence of outside things, to be capable of the weakness of jealousy and all its petty attendants, to have built up for herself a castle of air whose downfall threatened to submerge her herself at least for the time being.

Leam passed through the bitterest moment of her life as she sat there recalling the news Basil had just given. She was not keen or fierce or strong in this moment. She seemed to be robbed of all her power, all her energy, all her autocratic self-reliance. How long she would have sat thus she could hardly have told, but the sound of approaching footsteps in her direction acted as a stimulant to her shaken nerves. Drawing herself up proudly she set her lips into the simile of a smile, and folded her arms across her bosom—a natural and favourite attitude with her. She did not look forward to see who was coming, but contented herself with waiting for the intruder to advance.

She frowned the slightest degree in the world when this intruder revealed himself in the person of Mr. St. Leger. Although to serve her own ends Leam had deigned to be gracious in a sense to this man she had no real liking for him, and, in truth if she had not seen in him a possible ally, she would unhesitatingly and openly have expressed her disapproval of Lord Dunchester's action in bringing such a man to Cromehurst.

Grasping however as she had done instantly, the fact that St. Leger knew absolutely everything there was to know about Justina and her disreputable husband, Leam had for once put her prejudice on one side, and had stooped so far as

to admit this stranger to a certain amount of acquaintance with her august self.

If, however, there was one moment when she had less desire for Mr. St. Leger's company than another, that moment was the present. With her own keen perception sharpened by her secret hopes, Leam was quick to see that Mr. St. Leger was to the full as keen an individual as herself, if not more so, and she had no sort of gratification in realising that this man had doubtless read her character, and fathomed the ambitions and determinations that formed the staple portion of that character.

More particularly did she object, that such an one should be allowed to gauge her feelings at the present moment. However useful he might have been, he could help her now no further, and therefore Leam determined boldly to put a stop to Mr. St. Leger's friendly overtures now and for always.

She received him with absolute frigidity—a state of things that did not distress Mr. St. Leger in the very least.

He dropped into a chair beside her.

"You have heard the news of course, Miss Greatorex?" he remarked in a questioning tone.

"What news?" Leam queried, languidly. "I have been sitting here for the last hour or so, I believe. I have been asleep."

Her manner was as civilly rude in its indifference and objection to him as it possibly could be.

"Yes," St. Leger made answer, pleasantly; "I know you have been sitting here for a very long time, Miss Greatorex; but I don't fancy, do you know, that you have been asleep?"

He said this in the lightest tone with unruffled good humour, rather with a sort of tolerant indifference to her coldness, which was exceedingly distasteful to Leam.

"You are very observant!" she said, sharply. He answered—

"I am," in the same light easy way. "I make it one of my rules in life," he added, as if in explanation of this fact.

Leam observed a most utter indifference both to him and his rules of life.

St. Leger, watching her, could almost have laughed aloud.

"I made a decided mistake," he said to himself.

"She is not in the least a clever woman. I ought to have known that. With a character like hers everything would be too heavy—too strongly accentuated—to allow of much finesse or much subtlety. She is arrogant and vindictive, and where she hates she can hate; but she is not clever; no, certainly not, otherwise she would not play so tactless a game with me!"

He threw himself back in the chair and struck a comfortable attitude, thereby rousing Leam's annoyance to a much greater degree.

"I really imagined you had heard Sir Basil's information, Miss Greatorex. His voice is very clear; it travels well."

Leam remained silent; she felt, for almost the first time in her life, at a disadvantage; she did not understand this man, consequently she could not dominate him.

His manner was to her now most offensive, and with all her nerves unstrung, and her hopes shattered, she felt a sense of sulken anger rise within her against herself for ever having permitted him to approach so closely to her as he had done.

She could not fail to see that St. Leger had read her present mental condition absolutely; the thought that she and her inmost secret was at the mercy of this man was little less than torture to her. A flush, born of this anger and pain, rose on the pallor of her face; but she never moved from her cold, hard attitude.

Mr. St. Leger looked at her admiringly.

"Not a clever, nor a good woman; but, by Jove! she is handsome!" he said, to himself. "I must confess I like a woman with a spice of the devil in her. Not the easiest going for wives, maybe, but they have other charms greater than domestic perfection. She is taking this better than I thought, yet it has gone dead home for all that. I expect she will change her manner a little when she hears all I have got to say to her. I won't say it just yet, however, she doesn't deserve

much consideration. I shall pay her off a little for trying to shut me now she thinks I am no longer any use—that is where she proves herself by no means a clever woman."

He was looking at Leam all the while he was thinking this, and she perfectly aware of his gaze, though seemingly indifferent to it, frotted beneath his bold eyes, and hated him for his insolence and for the power he made her feel.

"Upon my word," St. Leger said to himself, as he looked at her proudly set head, her dark eyes, her magnificent figure, "I should not mind sharing life with her myself, only that I am afraid she would be an expensive luxury, and moreover, if I get the money I expect, well, there will be nothing to prevent her from becoming Lady Fothergill, of Cromehurst, and perhaps, the rogue, added to himself, with a sort of amused impertinence, "she would be better suited to that position than to the life I could offer her."

Having thoroughly impressed Leam with the knowledge that he was absolutely *au courant* with all that was passing in her mind, he began speaking again.

"Well, since you did not catch the news Sir Basil had to give us, perhaps you will allow me to repeat it to you now, Miss Greatorex," he said.

Leam rose frigidly.

"Many thanks—I do not care for gossip, and it is getting late, I must go home." She bent her stately head and prepared to move away as she spoke, but Mr. St. Leger had not done with her yet. He sprang to his feet also as she rose.

"I hope you will allow me the pleasure of escorting you across the park, Miss Greatorex?" Leam began to walk down the room.

"I have no need of an escort," she said, now fully roused to anger by this man's persistence. Worried, tormented, oppressed by all she had to bear, St. Leger's impertinence was the last straw to her endurance; she turned upon him sharply.

"I beg you will have the goodness to leave me!" she said, haughtily, but not very steadily. "I do not desire anyone's company, I prefer to be alone!"

He dropped back instantly with a bow; but Leam went away feeling she was by no means the conqueror, for she had caught a mocking gleam in his eye, and his voice, chanting a light song, was wafted after her as she went from the room.

"He is intolerable—intolerable!" she said to herself, passionately. "I am rightly punished for allowing myself to have had any pretence of acquaintance with him."

Skirting the ball-room, Leam made her way down a corridor which led direct to the grounds. She wanted to avoid all the others, and was fortunate enough to find the door at the end of the passage left unlocked. Away, scattered about the big rooms of the house, she could hear the voices of the girls and their attendants, all preparing to take their homeward course sorrowfully.

Leam escaped out into the cold air of the afternoon. Her brain and heart were aflame. She was possessed of anger that almost paralysed her.

She walked along so quickly, that she had arrived at the lodge-gates almost immediately.

Everything in this day had been disastrous to her, and the sense of her own hopelessness and helplessness grew heavier and heavier as the moments passed.

The thought of what her future would be, boxed up in this small place, having Justina's happiness and triumph perpetually under her eyes, made her proud heart fail, and her strength falter.

"I must go away," she said to herself, fiercely, passionately. "If I cannot go alone, then I must work so that mother consents to leave Cromehurst. To live on here—to know what I have lost, what she has gained—to see her in my place—oh! I could not bear it! I could not bear it! The present is hard enough, but when that other time should come, it would be beyond me altogether!"

She wended her way back to her home in a dull, heavy mood. Every now and then her hatred of Justina would flame up like a streak of fire in the sullenness.

"She has triumphed over me!" Leam said to herself as she reached the gate of her mother's house and stood looking back to where Croome Hall reared its head in graceful lines. "I did not imagine she would have won him; but she has, and I must bear it as well as I can; only I pray—I shall pray all my life—she will never have happiness. If prayers and determination have any power, this will be granted to me; I shall be content," the woman said almost eagerly, to herself. "I shall be content even if I see her become his wife if I can only know there is no happiness. I want her to be miserable. I want her to taste some of my pain. I want her to bow her head from trouble, and I pray I may live to see her do it!"

And so with her heart lost to all goodness, all honour, all womanliness in this first moment of her defeat Leam Greater turned and entered her home, desiring nothing but the satisfaction of gloating over her innocent rival's misery, when that misery should come.

It is not granted to all human beings to see the fulfilment of their strongest desire granted to them; but the sight of Justina's anguish of heart and absolute desolation and misery was a fact that would be given to the woman, who hated her so remorselessly, and who prayed so revengefully for her unhappiness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOLLY sat long into the night with Justina at the close of that eventful day. Neither girl spoke very much. Justina had gone back to her little cottage at her own special desire.

Mrs. Baines, the old landlady of those well-remembered rooms in Bayswater, was conveyed back there also, and Janet undertook to find the stranger a good dinner. Mrs. Baines, though she had brought great news, had very little information to give. All that she could say was that the day before her arrival on the scene at Croome Hall, a gentleman, a foreigner, had called at the rooms and asked to see Mrs. Seaton. He was of course informed Mrs. Seaton was not there.

"Not that I tell him where you was, my dear," observed Mrs. Baines most shrewdly. "I ain't a-going to give no information to nobody, though I must say you ain't the one as need fear no one a-comin' after you; but all the same, I always am on my guard against these so said gents as comes askin' for people, and so, when this French gent he asked for Mrs. Seaton, I said you was gone, and I didn't know where you was—which was a lie, but I hope it'll be forgiven me, my dear, that I do!"

Serious as the matter was, it had been a hard thing for Molly not to express her feelings by a smile at the good woman's manner, but she restrained naturally from doing so, and, indeed, in a little while the news Mrs. Baines had brought drove all thought of smiling from her mind.

The "French gent" had come on purpose to carry to Mrs. Seaton the news of her husband's sudden death. Rupert Seaton, it was said, had caught a violent chill whilst staying in Paris, and before twenty-four hours had hardly elapsed he had succumbed to an attack of dangerous internal inflammation, the serious nature of which had been increased evidently by the weakness of the dead man's constitution, and the dissipated condition of his system.

Armed with a document setting forth the certificate of death, good Mrs. Baines had hastened, without loss of a moment, to present herself at Croome Hall and acquaint Justina with her own lips of what had occurred.

"Not but what I was wicked enough to be glad," she confessed to Molly, when they were alone. "I never could abide that young man, my dear."

Mrs. Baines had always been famed for her affectionate ease of manner, but Molly found nothing disagreeable or impertinent in the good soul's familiar address. She had reason to know how kind and womanly and warm was the heart that beat in this humble woman's breast. A bond of something like friendship and distinct sympathy had been formed between them in the days when Justina had lain hovering on the edge

of the grave, and Molly was well versed by this time in Mrs. Baines' opinions of Rupert Seaton.

"He were a real bad lot if ever there were one, my dear," she had been used to say to Molly in that bygone time, and she did not hesitate to use the same words to him now. He was dead and gone. "Not so much as fit to wipe the mud off her feet; and she a toilin' and a slavin' from morning to night just to keep him in luxury. A hinvalid he called himself—a precious lot of hinvalid about Mr. Seaton! I tell you there, I do Miss, I were real glad when he took himself off, only I never did think she'd have fretted for him so much as to get as ill as she did; well, it only shows that we women are a funny lot, my dear!"

"She is not a woman, she is an angel!" Molly made answer to all this, and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke. Her heart was in a tumult. She hoped it was not very very wicked, but how was it possible she could do aught but rejoice at a fact that meant happiness for the two people who were dearest to her on earth, if it were proved to be quite, quite true. If, when Basil returned, he should bring with him the most conclusive, the most certain proof that Justina was a free woman—what then could stand in the way of their happiness; Molly tried hard to curb the rising joy and hope that swelled within her heart.

To see Basil at peace—to know that he had won the one woman on earth he loved—to feel that the problem of Justina's future was settled in the one and only way she designed to see it settled—what greater joy could there be for Molly Fothergill?

Certainly no one of her own hopes was so clearly defined or so great as the hope, the desire she had to give her beloved brother happiness or to see the girl-friend she cherished secure from the trials of her hard and desolate life.

Justina had not gone to bed, though Molly had entreated, and Dr. Wyllie had prescribed, this treatment.

She had come back to her cosy little drawing-room, and after Molly had seen her safely there she had left Justina for a little while.

Her object was to go round to the principal members of the amateur corps and to tell them that at Mrs. Seaton's express desire there was to be no alteration in any of the previously-made arrangements; and that although the clever authoress of the pantomime would henceforth be absent from her share in the entertainment the affair would go on just the same notwithstanding.

Molly had not desired this, but Justina had insisted.

"Oh, you must dear, you must!" she had said in her weak tired voice; "think of all the disappointment there will be, and moreover, what right have I to cloud everyone's pleasure and happiness with my troubles? Dear Molly, if you care to make me glad you will do what I ask without delay."

Molly had given in after a little obstinacy, and great was the rejoicing in Croomehurst when her mission was fulfilled.

Every one was very sorry for Justina, though there was a vague sort of feeling about that they did not know whether the death of her husband was indeed an evil thing to her; but still every one was sorry for her trouble, and every one unanimously regretted her absence from the scene of action.

Lady Sartoris, of course, went to call on her niece as in duty bound; but was, it must be confessed, considerably relieved when she heard Mrs. Seaton was not well enough to see anyone. Lady Sartoris was never at her ease with Justina, and in the present case she would literally have been at a loss to know what to say. To herself she said it was more than a good thing, and of course, she decided without further ado that Justina would marry Basil Fothergill.

"Anyone can see with half an eye that he is madly in love with her," Justina's aunt mused, as she became acquainted with what had happened.

"My goodness, Justina has some luck after all, to be mistress of Croome Hall! It will be a splendid thing for the girl. I am glad now I have shown her some attention."

Although Justina refused to see her aunt, she nevertheless, had one visitor.

"Molly," she had said, when Miss Fothergill was ready to go, "I must see Mr. St. Leger. I feel I shall be more satisfied when I have seen him." She paused a moment. "He used to be a friend of poor Rupert's, he may know something. I should like to hear all I can about his life. Oh, Molly! it was so terrible for him to die like that, alone and—"

"And unrepentant," is what was on the girl's lips; but she did not speak the words. She bent her head and covered her face with her hands.

She was dreadfully distressed about the matter. All the wrongs Rupert had done her seemed to be wiped out by the solemn act of death.

She could remember nothing save that he had been all alone at the end. Perhaps he had died because he had been uncared for, untended.

Her tender heart was full of sadness for the dead man—full of regret over his untimely death. There was, too, a little self-reproach in her thoughts.

"I was harsh to him," she said, recalling the last interview they had had with a shiver. "I said bitter things to him. Perhaps, who knows, if I had been more gentle, if I had made allowance—"

And then, even against herself, and her tender pitying heart, Justina felt she had not been unjust to her husband.

She knew that the wrong he had done had been deserving of far greater reproach than she had given him.

She sat crouched up by the fire all the afternoon. She heard her aunt's voice asking for her, and gave a sigh as the carriage wheels rolled away, and at last she heard the clang of the gate, and a man's steady footstep on the path.

She could not rise to greet St. Leger when he came in. He had instantly obeyed Molly's request, but he had come with no great pleasure. Not that Justina could alarm him, but she had a trick of touching him, of appealing to his better self which was disastrous to his scheme. He came, however, and his heart, callous and hard as it was, could not resist a feeling of intense pity for this lovely, frail-looking girl whose wan face wore an air of anxiety and trouble it should never have known.

"You are very good to come," Justina said, stretching out her hand to him. "You asked me to-day to call you my friend. I—I am going to take you at your word, Mr. St. Leger. I want to ask you—"

"I will do all in my power," the man answered hurriedly. He was more than uncomfortable at first but after a moment habit, which is second nature, soon overcame his compunctions. What ever else too was to be considered his own safety came first of all and the matter had gone too far now for him to attempt to draw back or make any change in the plot he was working so callously against this girl's happiness and for the enriching of his own pocket.

Justina began her questioning eagerly. She asked him all sorts of information. She wanted to have some idea as to how Rupert had lived what he had done since they had been apart.

"Do not think this idle curiosity, Mr. St. Leger," she said, after she put all her questions to him. "It is not that—only I cannot forget that Rupert was my husband, and despite all, yes, all, I would have wished he could have died knowing my heart was never really hard towards him, and that I should never have left him had he cared to stay with me."

St. Leger looked at the beautiful bowed head. "You poor sweet angel," he thought to himself, "and you can waste your sorrows over a cur-like that! Almost I could wish indeed the brute were dead, for your sake!"

He answered her in a grave, quiet voice; he denied all sort or kind of knowledge of Rupert Seaton. He emphasized the lie he had told her earlier in the day, he swore he had never seen Rupert for months and months—he was grieved, but he could give her no information such as she needed. If it pleased her, however, he would try and find it for her.



"YOU HAVE HEARD THE NEWS, OF COURSE, MISS GREATOREX!" ST. LEGER REMARKED IN A QUESTIONING TONE.

Justina sank back fatigued with her emotion. "Do not trouble," she said, gently. "Some-day if—if this report is proved true, some day I may learn something about him. I must be patient and wait for that day."

"Sir Basil may be able to bring you some news," St. Leger said, when he rose to go. He did not endeavour to prolong the interview; it was not an agreeable one to him. Justina had a way of shaking him in his purpose, and this he did not like.

As he walked away from the little house his thoughts dwelt on the girl he had just left and the other girl whom he had fathomed so cleverly.

"What a difference," he said to himself, "what a difference! I am sorry for Basil Fothergill; for all his confounded honesty I like him, and I should not object to see him happy, which he certainly will never be if he marries Leam Greatorex, as I fancy he is pretty sure to do when time has softened the blow that is coming upon him and his love. I wonder how he will get on in Paris? I hope to Heaven Seaton will be careful. I wish now I had planned to have been there. At this time it wants a cool brain, and Rupert is such an eel who can say what he may not do if he thinks he sees a chance of outwitting me! Let him try!" George St. Leger suddenly said, with a fierceness that swept away all his good-humoured appearance and showed the man as he really was.

"Let him try, that's all. Curse him! I wouldn't give much for his life if he tries to play a double game with me. I think he knows I am dangerous; therefore, as he is a coward, he will no doubt run straight—that is as straight as he can."

Walking through the village St. Leger met Molly returning to Justina's house, escorted by Lord Dunchester. The two were quarrelling as usual, and Molly was laying down the law with a little more than her customary vehemence. The subject of their quarrel this time was Leam and her attack on Justina.

Molly chose to imagine the Earl was attempting to excuse Miss Greatorex and nothing could exceed the vigour of her wrath.

"It was a horrid, disgraceful thing, and you are as bad as she was if you dare to try and excuse her!" Molly flamed.

Lord Dunchester tried to explain.

"Of course, I don't excuse her; I only meant to say—"

"Oh! you are so stupid sometimes. You say one thing while you mean twenty others. I wish you would grow less like a Chinese puzzle, Philip."

"I will grow like a potato, if you will only call me Philip very often," the young man said, audaciously, whereat Molly flushed furiously.

"How impertinent you are! I am not in the habit of calling people by their Christian names!"

"Why, only this moment—"

"What? I called you Philip! Well, if I did, it was an accident. I am so accustomed to call the dogs when I am out for a walk, that—"

"Oh! if I am a dog"—and this time it was Lord Dunchester's turn to flush a little—"you know!" he said, after a moment's pause—"you know you are so awfully down on me, and I—I—well there, I am a fool I suppose, Molly—but I cannot bear you to be down on me all the time. Just look at the way you are jumping on me to-day."

"You silly boy. Cannot you see I am so excited I don't know what to do with myself?"

"Excited!" repeated Lord Dunchester, not without some natural curiosity. "Excited! what ever about?"

"What a booby you are!" cried Molly, fully exasperated by this dullness of comprehension.

"Oh! that's right, abuse me. No matter what happens, I am always the person to be blamed."

Molly struck him lightly with her dogwhip.

"Philip, if you are good, I will tell you my secret!" she said, with a charming look up at him.

"If you will, I—but no—I had better not say what I will do!"

"Don't you see why I am excited?" asked Molly.

Lord Dunchester shook his head.

"I am a booby and a Chinese puzzle, remember," he said, mischievously.

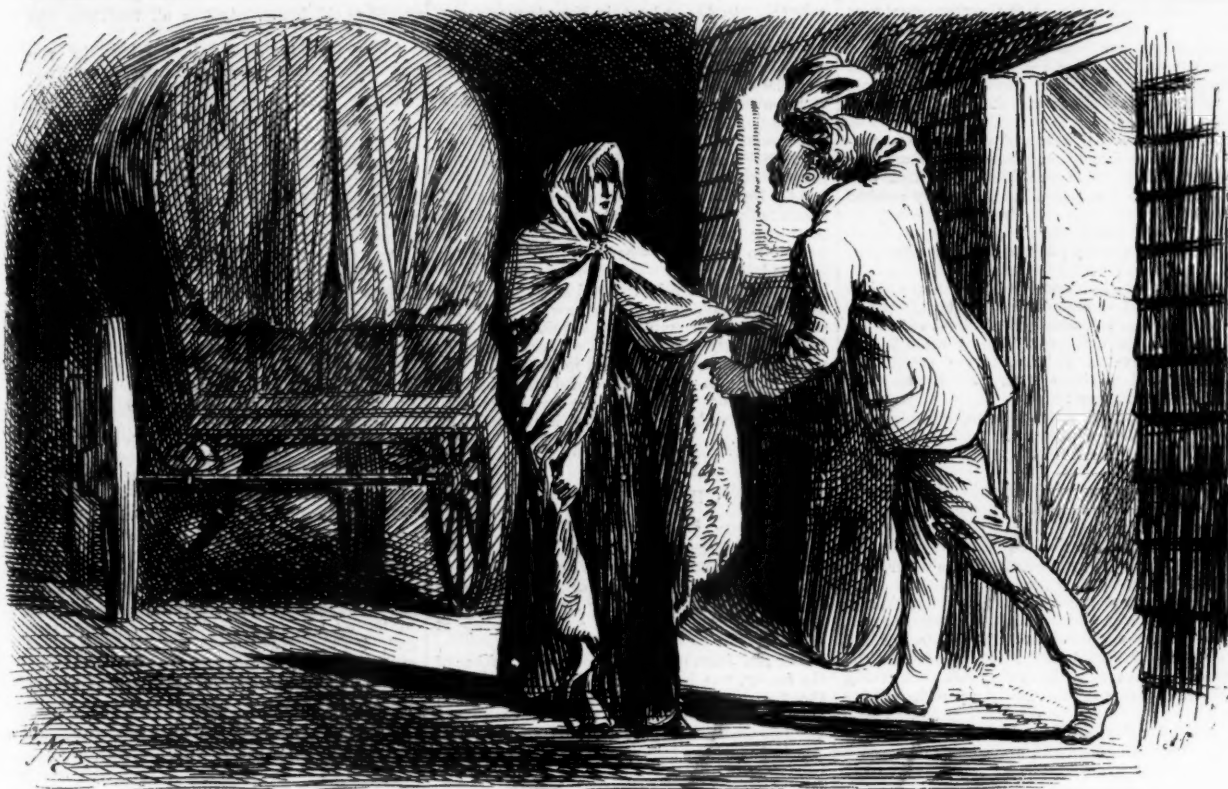
"I will call you something worse than that, if you are not careful!" Molly cried, and then she grew serious. "It is because of Basil and Justina," she said, and then she told him all there was in her mind. "Does it seem very wicked to say I hope the news will be true. Oh! Philip, he has treated her so badly, he has made her so unhappy, and—now—now if this were true—if she were really—really to be free, think what a lovely life she would have. Basil adores her. Oh! if you could know what I have suffered when I have thought of their unhappiness, and now, when this news has come, do you wonder now I am a little excited?"

"Indeed, I do not," the young man said most earnestly. "Dear old Basil—dear old chap, he does deserve all the happiness in the world, and she, too, she is so lovely. You know I very nearly lost my heart to her, Molly, only—it is not quite mine to lose, you see," this very artfully. Then quickly, before Molly could say anything, "By Jove! I feel excited, too. What a splendid thing it will be!" and then Lord Dunchester came to a standstill. "But I say, Molly, what about Leam! How will she take this, do you think?"

"What has Leam to do with it?" queried Molly, hurriedly, but all the same she was conscious of a curious sensation at her heart.

In her anticipations of Basil's happiness she had forgotten everything else, but now she was recalled suddenly to other things, and the thought of Leam in conjunction with the future she had been sketching out was not at all a happy one.

(To be continued.)



"STAY—A MOMENT!" LINA ENTREATED. "I MUST SPEAK TO YOU AT ONCE."

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY.

—10:—
CHAPTER XV.

THE DANCE CONCLUDES.

TEN minutes later the after-supper dances were in full force; and the dancers themselves, refreshed and invigorated, were "footing it"—as Reuben Hubble expressed it—in a style which would lead one in ignorance of the truth to suppose that the high-finks were only just beginning instead of being, as they actually were, in their second and final stage.

Sir Philip Wroughton, alone, a cigarette between his fingers, was pacing slowly to and fro in the Hubbles' cool wide hall. The hall-door was ajar, and the air from the riverside blew in.

The clocks had struck three; the "glimmering wind" of wintry dawn was "winnowing the deep dense plumes" of the night. Already, low down in the sombre east, wan daffodil streaks were dimly visible, stretching gradually athwart the chill morning sky.

Waiting carriages, with sleepy coachmen—amongst whom was the dissolute Nicky Burden, in charge of a Marley fly from "The Bear"—and tired, patient horses, whose nostril-breath looked like fog in the cold air where the carriage-lamps shone out upon it, blocked in a long double line the dark high road near the house.

"A cigarette in the 'all, Sir Philip?" said Mrs. Hubble sweetly to her privileged guest. "Oh, certainly! Nobody I am sure can object; and you know that I always like you to make yourself at home here, Sir Philip."

Had Sir Philip suggested a cigarette in the ball-room, Mrs. Hubble would have said, "Oh, certainly!" with equal *empressment*, and would have been likewise positive that "nobody could object" to the proceeding.

A slender figure, in a pale yellow gown wreathed about with blood-red leaves, passed him swiftly on its way to the staircase. The hall was brilliantly lighted; the pearls upon Lina's neck and

arms for the first time caught the eye of Wroughton.

She heard a sudden exclamation behind her; she halted, turned at once, standing upon the lowest stair.

"Did you speak to me, Sir Philip?" she said. Her manner was extremely odd, he thought afterwards—cold, sharp, and constrained. Governesses, servants, nobodies like this Miss Ferris, were not in the habit of addressing him like that.

He advanced towards her, pale, frowning. It was neither a kind nor a pleasant face for a man of middle age; nor indeed for one at any time of life. The record of the years which lay behind him must have been full of bitterness and discontent, if truth can be read in the lineaments of a man.

There was something unnatural, almost unearthly, the girl was thinking as her eyes rested upon him, in the contrast presented by his cropped gray hair and his close black beard and brows.

"I—I beg your pardon," he began uneasily. "I beg your pardon—er—Miss Ferris; but that necklace you wear to-night—I—I—er—may I ask—"

He stopped; fancying that she would, perhaps, anticipate his desire and help him out.

"Yes?" was all that she said, however; a cold and haughty monosyllable, uttered interrogatively.

"Those pearls, you know," said Wroughton vaguely, the troubled frown still puckering his straight black brows. "I—I should like to hear how they came into your possession—if—er—that is—you will pardon the seeming impertinence of the inquiry? They are unique in their way, I believe. Only—er—only once before in my life do I recollect ever to have seen any others exactly like yours."

As they stood there together thus, facing each other, Lina upon the lowest stair, Sir Philip upon the bearskin at the foot of the staircase, their questioning eyes were about on a level;

Lina's scornful and unflinching; Wroughton's embarrassed and gloomy.

Shouting, laughter, the sound of many capering feet, and music waxing fast and wild in some breathless Bacchanalian measure, were borne to the ears of those two, Lina Ferris and Sir Philip Wroughton, as they met and confronted each other without the ball-room door. But the reckless, jubilant sounds were to them like sounds heard in a dream. In that minute the aspect and significance of the present were forgotten, and they twain stood, as it were, alone in creation.

"You would like to know, Sir Philip," said Lina, slowly and distinctly, touching first the twisted necklace close-clasping her small smooth throat, and then one of the bracelets which in like fashion encircled her wrist, "how these came into my possession? Why, too, perhaps, I am wearing them to-night? It is very soon explained. My father gave them to my mother—who is dead. I prize them very highly for her dear sake."

"Impossible!"

The ejaculation escaped Wroughton involuntarily. The next instant he had covered it by saying carelessly—

"Indeed—so! Pray, pardon my curiosity. You will admit that it was pardonable. It is all explained now." And with a slight bow, he turned abruptly away.

"Truth, Sir Philip is never impossible," retorted Lina, haughtily. "Truth and right conquer always in the end."

So saying, the proud, slender figure in the daffodil gown with dignity vanished up the broad flight of stairs.

"Curse the girl, whoever she is!" muttered Wroughton savagely, and yet in a manner insensibly. "Who the deuce is she, I wonder? What does she mean? Why is she here? Heaven speed the day, say I, when this place shall see the back of her!"

The hour had now arrived when dowagers and chaperons had begun to yawn prodigiously, and the meditations of elderly papas to turn longingly

to the pillows at home. But the youngsters were rebellious, undutiful, blind, in short, to all mute appealing glances from their elders. They lounged not for bed and pillows—not they!—and would romp and caper until six o'clock in the morning, if they were as stiff as a crutch for a week afterwards.

Mark Heruicastle, leaning against the conservatory entrance, scanned the faces of the remaining dancers as they flew past him in the last wild gallop but one. A gloved hand presently touched his arm.

"Mark, are you ready?"

He turned quickly; and saw Helen waiting at his side.

"I was this instant wondering whether you had not had about enough of it, old woman," said he—"wondering, too, where you had got to."

"Yes; I am quite ready, and I came to see whether you were. Let us get away now, Mark. I have said good-bye both to Mr. and Mrs. Hubbles. I am very tired."

She looked tired; and, for Helen, was singularly pale. She spoke wearily too.

"All right," said Mark, with alacrity. "Come along."

It was not long before they had quitted the Hubbles' house, with its display of Japanese lanterns, its flowers, and its riot, and were winding their way across the familiar bridge. Helen's arm now tucked closely under Mark's, to their own quiet home upon the other side of it.

The dawn wind was ice cold; the wan primrose light and thin gray streaks in the east were growing stronger every minute. The river looked a dull slate blue in the philly morning gloom. The moaning of the weir, the drowsy roar of the mills, fell heavily, almost mournfully upon the waking air.

In silence the brother and sister reached their own door; but although Mark, coming homeward, had not spoken a word, his manners to Helen was tender and kind enough. His heart ached for her.

Martha and the girl Jane were both astir, they found, and going about their household duties. They were early risers at the Lower Mills.

The dining-room was neat and cosy; a bright fire crackled in the grate; and, better than all, the fragrant odour of hot strong coffee came potent in from the kitchen regions. Helen flung off her wraps; her pretty plain white ball-gown seemed so fresh and unsoiled as when she had first put it on some hours now gone by. With a little shiver, she held out her hands to the blaze. Yes; she looked very tired and worn; there were purple shadows under her eyes.

"Well, old girl, how have you enjoyed it all?" said Mark, with a cheerfulness which was perhaps rather overdone.

"Pretty well, dear," replied she, as calmly as she could. "Are you going to lie down?"

"Not I. I shall just change this toggery—tub—have a cup of coffee afterwards; and then off into the mill. Why sit close on six o'clock. You, Helen, had better lie down; though you look fagged to death. You'll be knocked up else."

"No, I shall not. I couldn't sleep if I were to go to bed. I shall follow your example, dear—a bath and some coffee will refresh me more than anything. Mark—Mark," she faltered, going up to him and putting her hands very wistfully upon his shoulders, "what has become of Guy? He went home early—rather early—even before Sir Philip—did he not, Mark?"

Heruicastle placed his strong arm round his sister's waist, and drew her thus to his side.

"Yes, Nell, soon—soon after supper, in fact. I—I managed it, dear old woman; it was all right; I mean, all wrong, dear, of course. But not a soul knew anything at all about it, and—and it was better that he should get back to Moscourt, you see, before Sir Philip himself reached home," said Mark, bungling frightfully in his anxiety to spare poor Helen as much pain and humiliation as possible.

"He was driven home then, Mark?" Helen said, in a voice so low that it sounded like a moan.

"Yes. I got hold of somebody's fly from 'The Bear.' I'm sure I don't know whose; and then—and then it was all right, you know. It was the

only thing to do—at least, in the circumstances, the best thing to do, dear old girl."

"Oh, Mark!" she said, with a sorrow that was none the less touching because it was so quiet, "was he—was he very bad?"

"Don't ask, Nell," answered the young man soothingly, distressed at his sister's pertinacity. "It cannot be helped now."

It was seldom with Helen Heruicastle that intense feeling was allowed to get the upper hand. But she was sick and tired and disappointed to the sorest degree—a degree bordering on despair itself—and life seemed so weary—so very weary—her heart within her felt like lead.

"Mark, what will be the end of it—if he does not mend, Mark, what will become of him?" she said, in a voice of smothered anguish; and then fell to crying upon Mark's shoulder, as if that tired heart of hers must break indeed.

So for Helen Heruicastle ended the Hubbles' ball. As for Mark himself—forgetting Guy Arrington and his back-sliding—he dreamed all day of Lina.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEWS FOR MARLEY.

"Jaws, gal, that toast is burning," cried Martha, sharply. "Mind what you're about, do! You can hear what Davy's saying without gaping round at him like a daft gal. Keep your eyes on the fork, I say, and don't get staring up at Davy."

The girl Jane, squatting upon the steel bar of the fender, was holding a thick slice of bread to the fire. Davy, Crochet, with a wagon and team, had been into Marley that afternoon; and the foreman, who, whilst in the town, had just "looked in" at the "The Packhorse," had brought news home to the Lower Mills.

And no wonder the girl Jane stared!

Martha's roomy old kitchen was as scrupulously neat as it always was at this hour of the evening; the brick floor—with a square of matting before the hearth, and a sack spread about here and there where one was most likely to tread—was spotless vermillion. The stew-pans, the dish-covers, the lids of various cooking utensils which adorned the walls, the ancient brass candlesticks which crowned the tall black mantelpiece, all shone like looking-glass and flashed in the firelight; whilst the fire itself leaped and roared in a huge old-fashioned grate over-arched by a cavern-like chimney, with pot-hooks dimly visible in the sooty gloom.

It was six o'clock—the kitchen tea-hour at the Lower Mills. Helen was sewing and humming softly to herself in the dining-room. Mark—it being market-day there—was away at Red-ningster, and was expected home about half-past six.

The month of March was come—bleak and nipping and unkindly as usual, with as yet but little promise of a genial spring.

Sir Philip Wroughton was still at home at Moscourt, being often, as in days gone by, the guest of the Hubbles at Marley Mills; the Hubbles themselves going not infrequently to call on Sir Philip at Moscourt Priory.

Once or twice—"for a treat," Mrs. Hubble told the little ones—they had taken the children and the governess with them; and thus a great aim cherished by Lina Ferris had at length been accomplished without the least difficulty on her part. At last she had found herself within, had explored the interior of the home of Sir Philip Wroughton; for on one occasion he had been civil enough to show his partisans friends—acting, however, upon a broad hint thrown out by Mrs. Hubble—all over the fine old house, melancholy ruin though it was in these days.

They went from attic to wine-vault—at least, so the saturnal master of the Priory assured them—and Lina and the children having accompanied the Hubbles thither on that day, the young governess and her little charges, of course, went from attic to wine-vault too. But somehow Miss Ferris could not help fancying that there was more than one mysterious corner and corridor left unexplored in that hushed and

rambling old house. And in all likelihood she was right.

Thus had it come about that, in the simplest manner possible, Lina's desire was gratified.

She had scarcely dreamed, perhaps, that she would remain for so long a member of the Hubbles' household. She was quite aware that they all cordially hated her—except her two quaint and silent wee charges—and that if opportunity for snub or insult came within their reach, did they only too gladly avail themselves of the chance of inflicting pain upon her.

And yet she stayed on with them. She was her own mistress; she was perfectly free and able to act as she pleased; and she stayed on at Marley Mills nevertheless. It was true that she held in view a stern and resolute purpose which shaped her life and actions; yet—yet was there no other reason, unwhispered even to her town heart, for Lina's being content, in spite of odious surroundings, to remain in the neighbourhood of Moscourt Priory?

"That—or, lady, Miss Ferris, is still living with you, I see?" Wroughton observed one day to Mrs. Hubble, in a slow and questioning manner.

He had exchanged barely a word with Lina since that memorable night of the New Year dance. Notwithstanding, he was vaguely, yet distinctly enough, conscious of a tacit antagonism which existed between himself and this haughty girl—who doubtless for some motive best known to herself was masquerading as a governess—and, if the truth should be told, avoided encountering her as much as he could.

"Yes; she is still with us, dear Sir Philip," Mrs. Hubble made haste to reply; "but I do assure you that she may be going at any moment. Louisa and Henry—that's her husband—are such wretched correspondents, or we should know more than we do of their movements. As Louisa's health is nearly restored, they may be writing for us to send the children to them—or indeed coming down here themselves to fetch 'em away—this very day, to-morrow, next day, for aught we know to the contrary. Louisa and Henry are such an uncertain couple, Sir Philip. You never know their like. However, once let us get rid of our little Tommy and Joey, and away departs that stuck-up Miss with a quarter's salary in lieu of a quarter's notice; and sharp!" said Mrs. Hubble, nodding ominously. "I have promised you this before, Sir Philip," she added, "and depend upon it, I will keep my word."

"You are always very good," murmured Sir Philip, politely.

"Still, it is hardly worth while, dear Sir Philip, to send her about her business so long as the children stay with us, when their stay now may be so short, you see—"

"Of course—I apprehend," interposed Wroughton, gently. "She is—a rather—a rather singular, not to say eccentric, young woman, your Miss Ferris. Do you not think so, Mrs. Hubble?"

"Don't I think so? I have always thought so," replied Mrs. Hubble, getting excited. "We have never liked her—never understood her, Sir Philip. I really begin to believe I wasn't half particular enough about her antecedents and that; and Reuben thinks as I do now. Where, I want to know, does she get her smart clothes from, and the money, too, that she makes no secret of possessing? Take my word for it, Sir Philip, what we pay her here don't suffice for all her extravagance. Why, bless me! she thinks nothing of giving a couple of sovereigns or a five-pound note to that mad old Jasper Brooke at the Lock yonder; and, 'pon my word and honour, Sir Philip, the thought has more than once come over me that—that she may not be all straight—altogether honest—or—anything like that, I mean. She may be a thief in disguise, or in league with a gang of London burglars, or—dear me!—worse than that even," said Mrs. Hubble, waxing purple with indignation.

"I have no doubt that you have ample ground for suspicion," remarked Sir Philip, idly.

He was sick of the name and of the subject of Miss Ferris as discussed by Mrs. Hubble. After all, what were the girl and her motives to him? After all, too, the vague, hateful likeness which so

buffed and irritated him could be merely a freak of fancy. Why should it matter to him whether she went or stayed? He would banish her from his thoughts—he would forget her.

So the month of March came, and found Lina still sheltered by the Hubble's roof. She, and Helen Herculastle, during the past eight or nine weeks, had become intimate friends; and Lina's half-holidays, and any other spare time that she could make for herself, were about equally divided between old Jasper's cottage at the Lock and the homelier mills upon the other side of the water.

"What in the world you and Mr. Herculastle can see in that girl I never can make out," Sophy Hubble said once in a petulant way to Helen.

"Ah, existence for us all would be a dull affair indeed if we all of us thought alike and saw with the same eyes," was Helen's response, accompanied by Helen's own bright, shrewd smile.

Some of the happiest evening hours of Lina Ferris's life had lately been spent at the Herculastle's house; where as often as not, at the same time, Guy Arminger—happy-go-lucky, unstable Guy, who still was great at forming resolutions of amendment, and as great, alas! as ever at breaking through them; terribly downcast and gloomy and penitent one day; careless, oblivious of past offence, and joking merrily the next—was to be found as well.

Helen and Guy at the piano would sing and play duets together, try over new songs, or talk perhaps of the new novels appearing serially in popular magazines; whilst Mark and Lina—if Mark was not in the mill—sat there by the fire-side in the Herculastles' snug old drawing-room, conversing quietly with each other and listening to Guy's music meanwhile. Sometimes the two would play cribbage together—a game of which Mark was exceedingly fond, and of which he had taught Lina.

It was a very sweet old room, Lina Ferris thought; though it was homelike and unpretentious to a degree; with its somewhat faded carpet of red and drab, its drab and red window-hangings, with cumbersome brass cornices above them, and the furniture which had once been rubbed and polished by the housewifely hands of Mark's grandmother.

Yes; in the winter firelight, it was a dear old room, smelling always so deliciously of dried rose-leaves and lavender, of the *pot-pourri* secreted in the gay old china bowls. On Christmas Eve, in years long gone by, Mark's grandfather had ladled out steaming punch from those same old bulky china bowls.

The spring seemed to have come round very quickly that year, Lina said in one of her frequent letters to Portugal-square, which somehow of late had contained but little intelligence as regarded the cherished design which had brought her to Marley Mills.

"Rest satisfied, my own beloved," she was writing to Phil in his luxurious London home on that very same March evening which beheld Davy Crockett, his wife Martha, and the girl Jane with her teasing-folk, all seated at their tea in the kitchen at the Lower Mills—"rest satisfied," wrote Lina; "that as soon as ever I have accomplished anything definite, you shall hear at once what it is. Better than that, my dearest, it is not improbable that I may be the bearer of my own tidings—if they be tidings, of any worth. You know, moreover, without my wasting ink on these last lines, that I am yearning, Phil, to be with you, to see my beloved again."

The wind was rough on that March evening, though it came only in gusts at present. The night threatened to be a stormy one, and heavy drops of rain now and again were blown through the bleak gray air. Martha's kitchen-fire leaped and blazed right comfortably; the sparks, in scurrying shoals, hurried up the broad, black chimney.

Outside, in the mill-lane, the pollards there dimly discernible through the wide kitchen-lattice now all aglow with firelight, creaked and shivered and shrank before the wind; the shallow, wayside brook which they overshadowed gleamed fitfully like steel in the gusty gloaming.

"And as I was a-telling ye," continued Davy Crockett, who had been temporarily interrupted in the imparting of his news by Martha's rebuke

to the gaping Jane, "tise all over the town. Everybody's talking about it and saying every-where—"

"And well 'em might," threw in Jane, who was not easily crushed by Martha's sharp speeches; she was used to them, and familiarity had bred contempt—"my patience ma!"

"Do hold that silly tongue o' yours, if you can," cried Martha, her saucer, brim-full, poised cleverly upon the horny tips of three distended fingers, ere in this mode she carried her tea to her lips; and let Davy tell us what he's got to; can't ye? I suppose there's some as says one thing and some another, Davy?"

"Yes," replied Davy, "some on 'em goes about saying that Reuben Hubble ought to be downright ashamed o' himself for allowing it; and some says, as Sir Philip is as free as anybody, else in the land to please himself in the matter of a wife. There's reason in that, ye know, Martha, and it's all his doing o' course."

"All old Hubble's doing, you mean, Davy," remarked Martha, drily. "Any tom-fool could guess that."

"Well, six o' one o' 'em, perhaps, Martha, and half-a-dozen o' t'other, as you may say like," returned Davy, somewhat hazily. "They oblige one another, as I take it."

"And what does the young lady herself say to the bargain, I wonder?" said Martha. "It do seem shameful wrong, though, when you comes to think it over—it do, Davy—a-bartering the marriage yows about in that way!"

"Still, it must be nice to get married," threw in Jane, with a grin, "and be called 'my lady' by everybody, and wear silks and satens, if you like, every day o' the week—"

"Stuff-an'-nonsense!" scoffed the old woman. "She can wear silks and satens, if she likes every day o' the week, as it is, without going and marrying a man old enough to be her father. That's jest where it is."

"Yes, as Martha says, that's jest where it is, gal," chuckled Davy. "If she warn't gallus well able to buy her own silks and satens, and his'n as well as her own, and a darned lot more besides silks and satens, Sir Philip wouldn't want her, bless ye!—you may take yer oath o' that. In fact, he didn't want her in particler more 'an the other one, they was saying at 'The Packhorse' this afternoon. According to all 'counts, since he've got to take one o' 'em off old Reuben's hands, he don't care a brass farden which of the two it is."

"Well, 'tis a curious business, Davy, look at it how ye will," declared the gaunt old Martha, pursing up her lips and staring hard at her mate over the horn rims of her owlish spectacles. The dame had just taken them from her pocket, rubbed them thoughtfully in her apron, and set them upon her nose. She was going "stocking mending" after tea, whilst Jane would wash up the tea-things and tidy up generally. "A run and curious business, Davy; not only that, 'tis an unnatural one. And that's about the best you can say for it."

"Trew," said Davy, who never in his life had been known to contradict his wife, or to express on any subject an opinion contrary to her own. Davy, in his way, was the best and wisest of spouses.

"And no good will ever come of it, if the match ever comes to anything," observed Martha oracularly—"never! You see, Davy," she continued, carefully brushing into the fender the crumbs which had dropped on her apron, "it won't do—mark my words. Sir Philip's bad 'un and worthless as he is—belongs to the county gentry. When all's said and done, that's the truth of it. The Mossourt Priory folks have always reckoned themselves amongst the highest hereabout; and there'll be a fine flutter and rumpus among 'em all when they comes to know for certain that Sir Philip Wroughton is going to marry a daughter o' Reuben Hubble of Marley Mills."

"Trew enough," said Davy, scratching his head.

"O' course there's a deal to be said on the side of the money—especially when it's wanted bad," Martha went on. "We all of us knows that money now-a-days counts first with

ninety-nine people out of a hundred you run a-geen—"

"Trew," put in Davy again—"you never said a trawer word in your life, Martha!"

"But money," continued she, harshly, "have never yet purchased happiness in this world—not money of itself alone—nor specially in a marriage that we all may be certain sure was never made in Heaven, as the saying is, Davy."

What further homely second-hand wisdom the Herculastles' ancient hand-maiden might then have given utterance to would never now be known; for at this juncture, borne upon the wind, came the sound of Mark's gig-wheels rattling homeward down the mill-lane.

"There's the master," said Davy Crockett, staggering stiffly to his floury old-legs and pushing back his wooden arm-chair—"punctual as usual, Martha. I must be off."

The foreman went out into the yard, and Martha herself bustled up to find her work-box. Jane was flattening her nose against the lattice to see "Master Mark" drive past.

"Now, look sharp, gal, and set about tidying up, do!" exclaimed Martha, impatiently. "What are you gaping at there? The master's coffee 'll be wanted directly, and you'll have nothing ready!"

"I expect," answered Jane, irrelevantly; "that Master Mark will have heard all about it in Red-minster to-day; and Miss Helen may be, will tell us afterwards—"

"Heard all about what?" interrupted the old woman, brusquely.

"Why, all about the wedding that is to be," said simple Jane, with her broad, good-humoured grin. "I should like to see 'em married when the time comes. I suppose she'll have orange-blossoms, and di'monds, and—"

"There, you get along about your business, and don't stand a-idling and a-chattering about what's no concern o' yours! You'll never want a wedding-ring, gal; I'll answer for it—plentiful as fools are now-a-days!" was Martha's unsympathetic reply.

And Jane thought ruefully that Martha, after all, might prove to be right; for would not she, Jane, be nineteen years old come next July, and as yet she never had had a young man of her own.

That "young man of her own" was the dream of Jane's life! Was it, she wondered sometimes, to remain a dream for ever? Why, there was Sir Philip Wroughton going to be married when he had turned fifty, and his hair was quite gray! Surely, then, there was a chance yet for Jane?

Yes; that prediction of Martha's was unkind indeed. If gaunt old Martha's own wedding-ring, which Davy had slipped upon her finger—why, goodness only knew how many years ago!—had worn almost to a thread, it was plainly no reason why she should wax so bitter about possible wedding-rings for other people.

CHAPTER XVII.

HER FRIEND IN NEED.

MARK HERCASTLE, having written his business letters which demanded attention that night, talked over with astonished Helen the news which was rife in Redminster as well as in Marley-on-the-Wane, had, according to invariable habit, changed his coat and waistcoat for the homelier and dustier garments which hung behind the door in his den, drunk a cup of strong coffee, and then gone into the mill to ascertain how things had been progressing there during his absence at market.

"I suppose you heard the news to-day, Master Mark?" began curious old Davy, having watched his opportunity with the master when they two were alone together in an upper store-room.

"News! What news? I heard a good deal of one sort and another."

"About Sir Philip Wroughton and Miss Hubble, sir?"

"Oh, yes, I heard that. You have too, then, it seems, Davy?"

"Well, I was in Marley with the waggon, as

you know, sir, this afternoon, and coming home I just looked in at 'The Packhorse'—"

"Ah!" interjected Mark, briefly.

"Only for a minute, sir; and it was there that I first heard it."

"I don't doubt it," replied Mark.

He leant his broad back against a sack of meal—one of a tall stack near to which he stood—crossed his legs, folded his arms, and waited to hear what more Davy had got to say.

In the dusty and cobwebby caverns below them the familiar whirring and jarring and grinding were going forward as usual, with the heavy splash of the water as it tumbled over the great dripping wheel.

"And is it true, sir, do you think?" inquired the foreman.

"What did they seem to believe at 'The Packhorse'?" said Mark, with a smile.

"Why, there they all said 'twas gospel-trew," replied Davy, lifting his white cap with one hand and scratching his poll deliberately with the other—a cogitative trick this of Davy's. "And Miss Pinner, they said, had been seen in the town about middle-day, just afore I got there. She was doing some shopping for her young ladies, and had got the dogs with her; and more 'an one I know in Marley had spoke to her about it, and she didn't deny that there was trewth in it. For she laughed and tossed her head like, and said: 'Why not, indeed? Rank and money as often as not mated together in these days, when big folks went into trade as well as little 'uns.' Joe Dance—the ostler—he said as how Miss Pinner had flung her petticoats about and tossed her head that high, you'd ha' thought at least that she'd been going to marry Sir Philip Wroughton herself."

Herncastle laughed carelessly.

"Yes, it's all right enough, Davy," he said. "Mr. Hubble himself was at market, and I dined with him to-day at 'The Roebuck'—of course, he called it his 'lunch,' you know. A host of inquisitive friends attacked him upon the subject, and he never once denied that the rumour was correct."

Davy took out a blue-and-white check pocket-handkerchief and mopped his glistening forehead. "He'll be a bigger and grander gentleman than ever now, Master Mark," said he.

"That he certainly will," said Mark.

"And which of the young ladies, then, is it to be, sir?" inquired the old man—"Miss Melia or Miss Sophy? Some says one, some says t'other."

"I really can't tell you positively, Davy," replied the master, with a shrug. "But I fancy it is the younger of the two—Miss Sophy. And I wish her joy of her bargain, I'm sure."

"Well, my old Martha indoors, sir, she calls it a very curious bargain, and an unnat'ral one," remarked Davy Crockett, beginning at last to fold the heap of sacks which lay waiting his attention upon the dusty floor. "And I says that—"

"Martha is not far out," put in Herncastle, preparing to descend to a lower room, where the ponderous millstones were crushing the corn; when—

"You're wanted directly, sir," called up one of the men, who had received the message from a "mate" working yet lower down in the mill. And Mark in that instant was reminded irresistibly of a certain dark and blustering night in the November of the past year, when Lina Ferris, in Nicky Burden's fly, had been conveyed by mistake to the Lower Mills.

Recalling vividly now the incidents of that night, he hastened down the steep ladders, and found, to his joyful surprise, that Lina herself was indeed once more waiting for him at the mill-door. He was astonished; and yet somehow not astonished, for the current of his thoughts just then had been suddenly turned towards her.

"You!" Mark exclaimed, his brown face aglow with happiness at so unexpectedly beholding her. "How good of you to come. We will go indoors and—"

"Stay—a moment," she entreated. "I must speak to you at once."

He perceived that she was wrapped in her long fur-lined cloak, and that the hood of it was drawn closely over her head, almost concealing her face. His first sensation of keen delight subsiding

on cooler reflection, he marvelled somewhat perhaps that she should seek him at the mill itself instead of going straightway to inquire for him at the house.

Moreover, he then discerned that her manner was agitated—the light from the open mill-door streamed out upon them both—that she was striving for calmness and self-command before attempting to explain to him what had brought her thither.

"What is it that I can do?" inquired the young man, earnestly, longing to clasp her then and there in his arms, and to soothe her thus upon his strong, true heart.

He had never as yet told her openly that he loved her; he fancied sorrowfully enough at times that he never would, never could find the courage to adventure so far as that. But his secret when he looked upon Lina, lay mirrored in Mark's eyes—ay, lay mirrored therein so clearly and so eloquently that herself and all the world might read it.

He knew instinctively that she was a born gentlewoman—pure, sweet, refined. Would she ever be persuaded to listen to his suit, to words of love, assurances of devotion, from him who was nothing—as he told himself with proud humility—but one of nature's gentlemen? Would that satisfy her? Was that claim sufficient? He was not sure, yet was in a manner plagued by the conviction that a gulf of some kind stretched between them. Of what width, of what nature, was that dividing gulf? Should he, upon one side, dare to put forth his hand and invite her, upon the other, to cross it, would not she stand there, resolute yet pitiful perhaps, shaking her head sweetly and mournfully, and murmuring back to him: "It is impossible!" Ah, who should determine until Mark himself had grown bold enough to settle the momentous question?

"What is it that I can do—tell me?" said he again.

In a little while Lina answered,—

"Not so very long ago, Mr. Herncastle, I gave you a certain promise—a promise made to you at your own request. Do you—do you remember what it was?"

"I remember it perfectly," said the young man, eagerly. "How could you imagine that I should forget it?"

"You said to me at supper on the night of that dance, Mr. Herncastle—Let us step aside into the shadow here," she broke off nervously. "Your men are looking at us."

A huge covered wagon, with "Mark Herncastle, Marley Lower Mills" painted in white letters upon the black tarpaulin, stood solitary there in the mill-yard. On this suggestion of Lina's they withdrew from the lighted doorway of the jarring mill to a spot in the yard screened from all view by the towering shape of the great lumbering wagon.

"You then asked me to promise," she continued, rapidly—"a promise, on my part, Heaven knows, freely and gratefully given—that, if ever at any time during my sojourn beneath the Hubbles' roof I should suddenly find myself in real need of a friend and a friend's help, I would in my trouble come straightway to you—to you and your sister Helen. That time, Mr. Herncastle, has now arrived. I find myself in absolute need of your help. I—I hope that I have not done unwisely in coming to seek you here instead of going—as I ought perhaps to have done—directly to Helen; but the truth is, I acted upon the impulse of the moment, impelled, I think, by the recollection of my promise of that night."

"You have done quite right," answered the young man, rather hoarsely—hoarse from the deep feeling which was stirred within him. "I am proud, more proud than I can say, that you should have trusted me, come to me in your trouble, and—"

"Hush, do not say that! please do not say that!" she cried, hastily. "I have merely done exactly what you were generous enough to ask me to do. I did not forget, you see, that is all—"

"Well, let me hear more," said Mark, as she paused, keeping business-like and collected only by a strong effort, "and we'll soon then make an

end of the difficulty, whatever it be. What is it, Miss Ferris—all this that is so bothering you?"

"To be brief," said Lina, a strange and mournfully sweet little smile shining out from under her sombre hood-border like starlight on murky night—"to be brief, Mr. Herncastle, you now see me before you homeless, roofless. I know not what to do for the best; indeed, but for you, not whither to turn either. To-night I have no bed even to call my own. It is true—I am not jesting. Will you and Helen therefore take compassion on the wanderer, and give her shelter at least for to-night? For in this place," cried Lina, still trying bravely to smile and to treat the matter lightly, as she extended, with an air of winning appeal, her small white hands to Mark, albeit her lovely eyes were glistening with tears which had not yet fallen—"for in this place she is far from those who are dear to her—her own people—she has here no friend but you!"

(To be continued.)

In certain species of vegetable growths there are found stones supposed to be formed and deposited in their tissues from the silicious and calcareous juices circulating in their organisms. Thus, in the bamboo a round stone is found at the joints of the cane called "taba-her." Another curiosity of the sort is the "cocoa-nut stone," found in the endosperm of the cocoa-nut in Java and other East India islands. Dr. Kimmins describes it as a pure carbonate of lime. It is sometimes round, sometimes pear-shaped, while the appearance is that of a white pearl without much lustre. Some of the stones are as large as cherries, and as hard as felspar or opal. They are very rare, and are regarded as precious stones by the Orientals, and charms against disease or evil spirits by the natives. Stones of this kind are sometimes found in the pomegranate and other East India fruits. Apatite has also been discovered in the midrib of teak wood.

THE Queen takes much interest in the Jews, and was sorry to hear of the death of the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. The Rabbi's photograph was brought home for the Queen some years ago by the late Duke of Clarence, who, with the Duke of York, was entertained at the residence of Rabbi Rafael Meir Fanidgil Haham Bashi, and there witnessed the celebration of the Passover by the Rabbi. The Jews about Jerusalem number nearly 40,000, and the late Chief Rabbi was looked upon by them almost as an earthly God. He was a great scholar, and kept much harmony between the various sections of the Jews in Palestine. From time to time he wrote strongly against the persecution of his people in Russia (where they have just now been commanded by a decree from the Governor-General of Warsaw to cease wearing their own dress, and to alter the fashion of their hair), a persecution which preyed strongly upon his mind. The late venerable Chief Rabbi was most Druidical in his manners, and he wore a beard that reached below his waist.

HONOURS are dearly bought in China. There a title is a species of office. Once gained, it qualifies the holder to draw a salary from the treasury in return for the performance of certain duties. A title can only be gained by success in war. An amount of quibbling at the bar, no brewings, however excellent, of draught stout, will make a man a peer. The most persuasive of special pleaders, this backward people would, in the figurative language of the third emperor of the dynasty, describe as a "bare stick," and, if they followed literally his late majesty's advice, soundly drub. Even the makers of ramshoo—the national—and nasty—drink, are held in no great repute. You must, if you would be enabled, either take a town from the rebels, or what is equally efficacious, commit suicide when the rebels are taking it from you. The Chinese, of all nations, perhaps, have the most vivid realisation of a future existence, for, as a rule, it is the heroic ghost who gets the title, his son succeeding him, after three years or so, as second peer.

MARSH FAIRY.

—20:—

CHAPTER XI.—(continued.)

SHE sat staring up at him for a time, and watched him curiously as he threw himself into a chair. With that strange gift of perception that had made the credulous believe she could tell fortunes, she seemed to read more of his thoughts than he was willing to acknowledge, even to himself, and after watching him intently for a little while, she got up and crossed to his side.

She was very quiet, but there was a despair in the beautiful face that would have touched the hardest heart. She placed her hand gently upon his shoulder.

"I thank you with all my heart," she said, slowly, "for your belief in my father's innocence. I thank you for your desire to help us, and I shall pray Heaven to bless you for all your kindness to us. But you must not go any further with it. Miss Naylor is to be your wife. You would never forgive yourself if you should prove her father to be such a scoundrel as that, for it would be a thousand times worse than murder to allow an innocent man to suffer for his fault, as mine has done, and—you would prove it. There, forgive me! I would not hurt you for the world by thought or word if I could help it, but I should hurt you worse if I should let you go on. You would prove Marcus Naylor to be a murderer. I feel it—I know it. Give us up. Let us suffer for ourselves without dragging you into it. Heaven knows it is bad enough without that!"

He lifted his ghastly face and looked at her.

"Do you think me such a coward as that?" he asked. "If Marcus Naylor is guilty he deserves to suffer for his crime; but he is not. I shall not abandon the case, I shall go on with it in face of all the world. There is nothing that could make me give it up—nothing, I tell you. Let the guilt fall where it will, let whoever may be involved, I believe your father to be innocent. I shall stand by my convictions and prove it if I can!"

She knelt at his feet and touched his knee with her lips.

"Heaven bless you!" she whispered. "If I should bring grief upon you through this, I should die of sorrow. I pray Heaven that they are both innocent for your sake, but I can not believe it."

"I cannot."

He placed his hand upon her bowed head and touched her hair with his mouth. She never knew it, and he could not have explained the passion that was at work in his soul.

CHAPTER XII.

MARCUS NAYLOR sat bolt upright in his chair and gazed at Maurice Lemaitre without speaking. It seemed that he had received an electric shock, so great was his surprise. And then the audacity of the man struck him.

He remembered how he had first met the man who had now demanded his beloved daughter in marriage. He was poor almost an outcast—an utter nobody, with only his handsome face to recommend him. He remembered how Maurice Lemaitre had seen him commit a crime, and how he had demanded money for his silence—how he had gone away to school for a term and made of himself apparently a gentleman, and then how he had followed him to Drayton having been nothing all his life beyond an operator on a telegraph at a very minor station. He recalled the fact that Maurice Lemaitre was nothing more than a very clever scoundrel, living sumptuously on a knowledge of guilt obtained by a most unfortunate chance, but he remembered at the same moment that Maurice Lemaitre had been smarter than he, and that the rascal possessed a tacit acknowledgment of his guilt in the same penmanship with which he was wont to sign his cheques at the bank.

It was curious how all those things seemed to flash through his mind as if by magic. The years seemed to roll by before his mental vision again, and it was as plain to him as if the events had occurred again.

And Maurice Lemaitre seemed to realize what was taking place in his mind, for he sat there quietly, nonchalantly, saying never a word, but instead took from his pocket a cigar and lighted it as indifferently as he would have done with Hugh Manning for a companion.

And then at last Marcus Naylor seemed to return to some sort of consciousness. He straightened himself in his chair as one does after a severe physical shock. It would have been infinitely easier for him to have seen his beautiful daughter dead than the wife of Maurice Lemaitre, and when the surprise of the request had somewhat spent itself, he said, endeavouring to control himself and speak quietly,—

"You must be mad! My daughter cares no more for you than she would for an Italian street vendor!"

Lemaitre did not even wince.

"I might respond in a similar vein with perfect truth," he said, "but that would scarcely be gallant. I am not asking you for your daughter's love, and I shall not distress her with any mad passion. I simply want to marry her; that is all. When I ask for love it will be time enough to tell me that that is impossible."

"Then why do you wish to marry her?"

"That is entirely my affair. Perhaps it is a whim; and if it should be, why, you are accustomed to granting my whims. What is the good of talking of it? You know that I never come down an atom from my demands, and you know also that while you demur at first, the result is always the same. You accede to the demand because you must. Now, for goodness sake, don't let us go over the old ground. You don't want Mabel to know that her father is a murderer?"

Marcus Naylor shivered, and Lemaitre saw it. He smiled as a demon might at the writhing of a lost soul.

"I think you know me well enough to understand that I will never treat my wife unkindly," he continued, coolly. "I am not the sort of person to beat a woman, and as for anything else, why, the lack of love would prevent her from caring. I have none of the small vices, and Mabel—"

"For Heaven's sake, man, hush!" cried Naylor, as if the words were barbed arrows to his soul. "Ask me anything under Heaven but that. If you want money, it is yours. If you want a partnership in my business, demand it. But don't ask me that. I can't do it! I can't, and, by Heaven, I won't!"

"Oh, yes, you will!" answered Maurice, indifferently. "I am going to give you until this time to-morrow night to consider it. There is such a good opportunity to hand you over now. Why, I could almost make a hero of myself! There is Vincent Farquhar languishing in jail. I could invent a pretty story of why I had been silent all these years, bring forward that bit of paper which is such an excellent specimen of your penmanship, and—presto, change! I think you would take Vincent Farquhar's place in a very few hours. No, no! I don't want any money now. Money is so deucedly vulgar, you know, and I never fiked business, so that the partnership has no charms. It is Mabel I want, and Mabel that I am going to have!"

"But she is the betrothed wife of another man!" cried Naylor, desperately.

"I don't mind acknowledging to you that that is precisely the reason why I want her, since you have brought it up. I hate Noel Chatteris. You never knew me to hate any one before, did you? Well, I hate him, and I am determined that I will get the best of him. I want to begin by taking his girl away from him."

"But you have no chance, I tell you. She will never consent."

"That is the reason I want you to come to my aid. Besides, it is much easier; it saves me all the trouble of a love-making in which there is no heart. Yes, you must arrange it."

"But she will refuse."

"I shouldn't advise you to allow her to do so."

"But how am I—"

"My dear fellow, to tell you that would be more trouble than the love-making. You must

think for yourself. I am going now, and I give you until to-morrow night to decide what you will do. I am not in the very least afraid that you will refuse, because you are not altogether a fool, you know. I shall not wait to see her to-night, because there are other things that demand my attention. You can tell her of my call or not, as you choose."

He picked up his hat, which was lying on the table, and arose, then looked down upon the banker.

After fourteen years the first dividend upon Marcus Naylor's crime had been declared. He had begun to think that retribution was a fraud, and that, except in so far as a few prickings of conscience was concerned, there was to be no punishment for his sin; but he recognised the fact, at last, that, while "the mill of the gods grind slow," it is exceeding sure, and the horrible fear of the coward capable of striking a woman down in the dark took possession of him.

He did not know when Lemaitre left the room, and did not respond to his good-night. That Mabel should be made a sufferer like that by the "accessory after the fact" of his crime, had never occurred to him, and to see her the wife of such a man as Maurice Lemaitre was the worst grief that could come upon him. Death was nothing by comparison.

He had felt so proud, so happy, when he heard of her engagement to Noel Chatteris; for, while Chatteris was not wealthy, there was no family in the county who stood higher, no lawyer in the country whose gifts were more thoroughly appreciated by the people. He was a gentleman by birth and breeding—a high-minded, high-principled man, whose word no one ever doubted; and Marcus Naylor, the banker, was proud to think that his beautiful daughter was to be the wife of such a man.

And knowing Mabel more thoroughly than any one else did, he saw clearly that she loved her grave-countenanced fiancée more than she could ever have done a handsomer man. Marcus Naylor was glad of that, too, because he saw that she would be happy. And now to know that all that must end!

He sprang up and tore up and down the room like a caged and enraged animal. It was the first fruit of his crime, and it hurt him a thousand times worse than if it had followed closely upon the heels of the murder he had committed.

"It shall not be!" he cried to himself. "I swear that it shall not! I would see her dead a thousand times first! I will find some means to silence him and prevent this. He does not love her. That is the point that may save her. But I will defy him and take the consequences before I will submit!"

And then he fell into a chair and quivered like a leaf in the teeth of a gale, for he knew that he had lied and that he dared not defy Maurice Lemaitre.

"But I will find a means!" he cried at last, springing up again. "I will find a means, so help me, Heaven! There are men in this town who would kill him for a thousand dollars, and—why did I never think of that before? I did not need to. I did not mind the money. But now—Mabel shall marry the man she loves. That I swear!"

There seemed to be something calming in the thought. He sat down, knowing that he must compose himself before he left that room; and in order to do so, he drove his mind from the thought to other subjects, and a vision came to him.

It was of the little crippled boy, the youngest child of Olive Farquhar.

A slow pallor crept into his face as he remembered. He recalled the fact that he had told one of the men at the bank to provide a place for the child and to keep him there, and a sudden desire to see Jack came upon him.

"I dare not face Mabel to-night," he told himself. "She would know at once that something had happened. I will go to see that child. Let me see—I have got William's number in my address-book. I will go there and see the child now."

"He looked at his watch, and seeing that it was still early, he took up his hat, walked out, and closed the library door softly behind him.

As he was passing the parlour he heard voices, and pausing, he peeped in from behind the portiere.

He saw Mabel and Noel Chatteris sitting there alone.

Then he went out.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLIVE's emotions were curious—almost indescribable ones—as she stood beside Noel Chatteris at the door of his office that afternoon.

The predominating element was hope. It filled all her heart, like a golden glow of sunshine. She felt that Noel Chatteris would accomplish that which he had said, and establish her father's innocence; but she felt at the same time that he would prove the guilt of Marcus Naylor, and she recognised the sorrow that must cause him under the circumstances that existed.

She knew that he was betrothed to Mabel Naylor, and that a man should not love with all his heart the woman who was to be his wife never entered her unsophisticated head; and she therefore knew the misery that he was bringing upon himself by championing her cause.

There was a troubled look upon her face as she stood there for a moment by his side, looking out into the gloaming, and he, observing it, said:

"Have you no confidence, little one, that I shall be able to help you? Do you think that I shall fail?"

"No," she answered, lifting her earnest, beautiful eyes to his. "I do not doubt but that you will succeed. I feel and know that you will; but there are others to consider besides ourselves."

"You mean—"

"I mean you. Oh, if I should bring shame and sorrow to you, I—"

"Hush, dear! You must not suggest such a thing again. It is wrong that I should listen to you. There! I know you meant only that which is right, and I honour you that you can put yourself sufficiently aside to remember others in such a trying ordeal; but if I allowed myself to even consider such an alternative as that, I should not deserve the love of a pure girl. Don't distress yourself over it again. Only think of the happiness that will be yours when your father is at liberty and is once more restored to you."

"You must not think me ungrateful," she answered, with a sigh.

"Nor do I," he returned, glancing away from her.

And then with that little ragged child beside him he walked down the street. "He would no more have thought of offering her clothing than he would have thought of offering it to the Princess of Wales; and he was not ashamed to be seen with her, in spite of the fact that she wore no shoes."

Somehow every one seemed to know her; and while one or two curious ones looked after the elegant society man as he walked leisurely along beside her, the generality of the men raised their hats and the women smiled a cordial greeting as he passed them. No one ever seemed surprised at any Quixotic thing that Noel Chatteris did.

He took her to an unpretentious but pretty house on one of the prettiest streets in Drayton, and rang the bell as one does who feels himself at home while not in his own house, and asked for Miss Thornton of the servant who answered his ring.

Grace Thornton came into the room, where he waited with Olive, and put out her hand to him with the cordiality of a sister.

"I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "You have almost deserted me of late." Then, seeing Olive, she took her also by the hand. "And you really have brought a guest with you?"

"Yes," he answered—"more of a guest than you think, perhaps. I have come to ask another favour of you, Grace."

"You have never asked one that I was not more than willing to grant, if it lay in my power."

"I hope this will not be an exception." "This little girl has had a most unfortunate experience to-day. You will doubtless read of it in the papers to-morrow. She has lost her protector, and I could not hear of her returning to that home in the marshes where you visited her one day in my company. I have come to ask if you will not allow her to remain here as your guest for a few days, or until I can make other provision for her."

"As long as you like," replied Grace, drawing Olive to her with a sort of protecting gesture. "Have you got time to tell me about it?"

"Not now. I will call to see you both in the morning, and in the meantime Olive can tell you all. It is a strange story. We will talk of it together when I come. I must leave you now. Heaven bless you both."

He took Olive aside for a moment, and whispered in her ear:

"Don't mention the fact of your suspicions to any one, dear. That would not be just, you know."

And then, with a pressure of her hand, he was gone.

When the door had closed him out of the house, he stood for a moment upon the step, looking back. It seemed to him, somehow, that he had not missed the sunshine of the evening until that moment. He could not understand his own sensations, perhaps because he did not try to analyse them. There was something in his heart that forbade his making the attempt, and he shivered slightly as he walked down the few steps and into the street.

And in the meantime Grace Thornton had taken Olive by the hand and led her up to her own room.

"You are not to tell me anything," she said, "until you have had some rest and some supper. You look utterly fagged. A nice bath and a change of clothing will do you more good than anything. My clothes won't fit you particularly well, but we can make them answer, and it will be lots of fun. Come right in here."

She led the way into a pretty apartment, not handsome by any means in so far as an expenditure of money is requisite to make an apartment handsome, but cool and dainty and sweet, with an odour of fresh flowers in the room that was refreshing.

The very sight of all that home comfort that seemed luxury to the poor little tired wanderer, unaccustomed as she was to the bare necessities of life, made the tears come to the beautiful eyes. No description of fairy-land was ever so beautiful to the imagination of a little child as that apartment was to Olive.

In her rapture she did not see for a moment that the room had another occupant, and it was not until Grace drew her attention to the fact that she saw an elderly woman sitting near the window with a dainty bit of sewing in her hands.

There was a cap on the grey hair, and the old face was wrinkled; but there was a sweetness of expression that was beautiful, though it did not require much of a physiognomist to discern the fact that she was not of that birth which patri-cians call "gentle." Her cotton gown fitted her neatly, and a black silk apron covered its front.

She looked up over her spectacles as the two girls entered. There was a smile upon her lips as she saw Grace, but it vanished when the other face showed past hers. An expression of wonder, then vague, half-awakened memory succeeded each other. She seemed to be trying to recall something in the dim past, and, only half succeeding, she rose slowly.

The sewing fell to the floor, but she did not heed it. Her spool and thimble rolled under the table, but she knew nothing of it. "She seemed to be listening to a voice of the past, whose utterances she could not quite comprehend, and then she heard Grace speaking."

"This is a little girl whom Mr. Chatteris has brought to us," she said, gently. "He has left her in our care, and I have promised that you will look after her as well as I."

Still the woman did not reply, and then there came a curious little cry from Olive. Grace saw

her fly past her, and in another moment she had thrown herself upon the woman's breast.

"Nurse—Nurse Dawson!" she cried, half wildly. "Is it possible that it is you? Oh, I can't believe it! Speak to me! Tell me that I am not mistaken!"

But there was not much need for words, for the woman's arms had closed around the small form, and Olive was hugged closely to the ample bosom.

"My dear one! my baby!" the good woman exclaimed, "I have found you at last! Where have you been all these years? I have looked so long, and waited so patiently for some word of you, and none ever came, and now, here, when I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again, you come to me in this fashion. Tell me of yourself and where you have been, and how Jack is, and where your father is. Oh, child! it seems to me that I shall never get through asking you questions."

"And I shall never tire of answering them," answered Olive, kissing her fondly. "Why, it seems almost as if I had found my own mother again, and that all those horrors were only nightmares, after all."

"Then you have suffered?"

"You have only to look at me to answer your own question; but it is all about to be at an end now, for I have not alone found you, but the best and truest friend that girl ever had. Just when I thought that I was the most miserable, when it seemed to me that the whole world was against me, and that there was no hope for me, then the change came, and I am the happiest girl under heaven!"

Then, inconsistently, she broke down and sobbed as if her heart would break. But there were two friends beside to comfort and console her.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was scarcely a danger in the catalogue known to man to which Noel Chatteris had not been subjected. He had faced death on several occasions in a manner that would have made the stoutest heart quail, and had faced it so fearlessly that his courage was a by-word among his friends, and enemies, if he had any, alike. He knew not the meaning of fear, yet there was something of that kind quivering in his breast when he mounted the steps of Marcus Naylor's sumptuous residence.

One familiar with the sensation would have recognised it quickly enough, and perhaps would have turned back; but such a thought as that never occurred to Noel Chatteris.

He was going onward as he had done so often in a hard fought battle, only in that instance there was the excitement and no thought of his own safety, and here was the man's characteristic point uppermost in his nature—sympathy, pity, what you will; but at all events it made him for the first time in his life timid at the thought of facing his adversary.

And more especially was this true when he remembered that the "adversary" was the woman who was his promised wife.

Noel Chatteris was not a fickle man. Once or twice he had fancied his heart captivated by some fair one; but the mere thought of making her his wife had proved to him that it was not "love," and he went his way. And then he had met Mabel Naylor just when he had given himself up as a confirmed old bachelor.

Her beauty pleased him, her intelligence appealed to him, and under all the hauteur of her manner and the indifference that she assumed, he saw that she loved him. Not that he was a vain man. Far from it. But neither was he a fool. And it was that very perception of his which told him that Mabel loved him which would have convinced a man more versed in the world and in hearts, that he was not in love with her. If he had been he would have been the last to see that she cared for him. But he thought he reciprocated her passion. He was proud of her, fond of her in a way, and he thought himself a very happy man when her father gave his consent to their union.

There had never been any violent demonstra-

tion of affection between them. People said that he was a cold man, and certainly Mabel had never had cause to think differently.

There had been occasions upon which his coldness had piqued her sorely, and that was perhaps the cause of her own apparent indifference; but Noel Chatteris was always courteous, always kind, always the attentive, delightful, if passionless lover.

He kissed her, as usual, when they were alone, when he entered her presence upon that evening; but it was in a preoccupied way, as a man sometimes kisses his sister.

He did not observe her manner, else he might have seen that it was somehow different from what it usually was. He might have detected a determination not to observe his indifference for once. There was a curious glitter in her eye, a flush upon her cheeks that was not quite natural but he did not see that. Her lips twitched nervously, too, and one of her hands held a fold of her gown in a curiously tense sort of way. The detail would have attracted him upon other occasions, for he was a man who usually saw everything that was to be seen; but now he only knew that she was smiling.

"I did not expect you this evening," she said, quietly.

"I hope you are not sorry to see me on that account," he returned, seating himself upon a divan and drawing her down beside him.

She turned to him with a new impulse in her manner.

"No," she answered, swiftly, and with a catch in her voice that might have indicated the suppression of a sob to an observer. "No, I am not sorry. What is the matter with you of late, Noel? You have not seemed like your old self. Has anything come between me and your love? I have wanted to speak to you of it and dared not. I have thought sometimes that I have been too cold, and that you resented it; but indeed the fault has not been mine. I did not expect you to-night, and you have found me in rather a hysterical condition, I am afraid, thinking over the change that has come upon you. At another time I might have concealed my true feelings from you, but to-night I cannot. Will you forgive me, dear?"

For the first time in her life she hid her face upon his breast. Her voice broke, but there were no tears in her eyes, only a wild sort of fear that was strange and horrible.

The expression that crossed his face was not one of pleasure, but might almost have been translated into pain. He did not speak at once, but held her very closely, sorry to the very bottom of his manly heart for her.

"Forgive you, Mabel?" he repeated, huskily. "Why, child, what is there that requires forgiveness? That you love me more than I thought? Do you think I would not be able to forgive that? Why, pretty one, you are trembling like a leaf. Mabel, have I hurt you so much? It is I who should plead for forgiveness."

"No, no!" she cried, huskily. "There is nothing of that kind. I only feared that you no longer loved me, and I could not bear that, Noel—I could not, indeed. It would mean death to me."

He lifted her chin with his palm and touched her lips with his; but it was still a kiss into which he could throw no passion, try as he would.

"You love me as much as that?" he asked.

There was just a little shudder, just a little contraction of the heart which she could not see; but there was something in his voice which she heard. There was no transport of pleasure in the question; but rather of sorrow and of pity. But proud as she was, haughty as she had ever been, she did not spurn him. She wound her arms about his neck and drew his head to her bosom with wild affection.

"So much as that!" she cried. "Have you never guessed? Can you not understand? Is your love so little that you cannot measure the depth of mine? Oh, Noel, it is more than love. It is sin, because it reaches idolatry."

"Mabel!"

"I know I should not say it. I know that it is unwomanly, and that I should leave all those

things for you to say, but I cannot help it to-night. My whole soul is bound up in you; and to lose you would mean madness."

He had grown a shade paler than before. There was a little frown between his eyes, and a sort of sickening sensation in his heart. But was she not his betrothed wife? He drew her more closely to him, endeavouring to force his heart where his will would have it.

"But you are not going to lose me, dear heart," he said, gently. "I confess that your words are something of a surprise to me; but, after all, your fear is foolish. There is no chance of your losing me. Are you not to be my wife?"

"Yes, yes; I know that. But there sometimes comes over me a fear that I may never be that. That something may come between us to separate us. Promise me that it never shall, Noel."

"I promise, of course."

"And you will keep your word?"

"I have never broken it in my life, Mabel."

"I know that. You are the best, the noblest of men."

He kissed her again, then, sitting with her hand in his, he said, gently,—

"And now, dear, tell me what has upset you like this?"

"Everything!" she answered, not looking at him. "In the first place, papa has told me of—of what occurred at the bank to-day."

"I thought he would."

"And he told me, Noel, that you have engaged to defend that man. But, of course, it is not true. You would never do that."

"Why not, Mabel?"

"Because he has accused my father of the crime. Is it not enough?"

"Not as I look at it, dear. Of course your father is innocent, but you must have some Christian charity. Think of that poor man wandering in marshes and hedges, not daring to show his face to mortal man, living on herbs and leaves with his unhappy children, and then do not wonder if his brain is turned. He is sick, dying. Surely, because in an insane moment he has made a charge which he never can support, you would not have me deliver him, without a hand extended to his support, to a fate that is a thousand times worse than death."

"But he has accused my father!"

"And should I not acknowledge to the world that I believed that accusation if I refused to defend him because of that foolish charge? I am not afraid to investigate the case, Mabel! If your father were guilty I should be afraid."

He was not looking at her, or he might have seen her lips whiten; he might have seen the curious, glassy look that came into her eyes. But her voice was almost calm as she exclaimed:

"But you will give it up because I wish it, will you not?"

He hesitated a moment, then answered:

"No, Mabel! My conscience tells me that the man is innocent. I must prove it for his sake and for the sake of his children!"

"Get another lawyer for them if you will, but for my sake you give it up. For my sake, Noel!"

"I can not!" he cried. "I have pledged my word, and I have already told you that I have never broken that in my life. Forgive me, dear, but I can not do it even for you. I came here to tell you this and to receive your approbation. Let me go now, Mabel, and leave you to think it all over. You will decide that I am right, and the charity in your soul will tell me to go on. I will come again to-morrow to hear those words from your sweet lips. Good-night, dear heart!"

She did not endeavour to detain him, but watched him go in silence. When the door had closed upon him, she sat down suddenly, her face white as death.

"The daughter of a murderer," she whispered. "I would give my whole life not to have heard that conversation to-night. But it is done. I know the danger that I am in, and I must save myself from it, let the cost to another be what it may. If I can but induce Noel Chatteris to marry me at once, it will take him from her. Maurice Lemaître will remain silent when he realises that no good can result from his speaking, and I can save my father from the punishment of his crime; for Noel Chatteris shall not go on

with this case, even if, after I am his wife, I am forced to tell him all. The daughter of a murderer!"

CHAPTER XV.

OLIVE was gowned in a creamy-white organdie, belted at the waist with a pale-blue sash, with a huge bow tied at the back. It was one of those short-waisted Empire effects that seem to fit anyone, and it gave her the appearance of a great exquisite child as she sat on the ottoman at the feet of Nurse Dawson, with her beautiful head lying against the ample knee.

The slippers she wore were a trifle too large, but they were infinitely better than bare feet; and Grace Thornton stood back to look at her, uttering now and again little cries of rapture as Olive fell into some new posture, that somehow always seemed more artistic and graceful than the last.

Nurse Dawson had always been regarded in every family in which she had lived more as one of themselves, a sort of chaperon for the elder girls than as a servant, and it was in a tone of quiet remonstrance that she addressed Grace.

"I protest that you must not do that!" she exclaimed, with a gentle smile. "You will turn the child's head. I'll venture to say that she has never in her life received so many compliments as she has since she donned this gown. I won't have her pretty head turned."

Grace laughed.

"Who is paying her compliments now?" she cried. "It never hurt any girl of sense to be told that she is pretty, nurse, and it won't hurt Olive. A little praise does one a world of good sometimes. Isn't that true, Olive?"

"I don't know. I don't seem to know anything this evening. Do you remember that old maxim, that 'the darkest hour is just before the dawn'? Well, there was never anything truer than that."

"In what way do you find an illustration of it now?"

"Why, in my own case. This morning I thought there was no hope under Heaven for me. I was the most miserable girl under the sun. My father was accused of a horrible crime, and it seemed impossible for me to assist him, not possessing a single friend in all the world. He had already been convicted of the crime, and it seemed that there was no one to believe in his innocence but me. And then, just as I had abandoned all hope, I found a friend who was not alone willing to help me, but who, convinced of my father's innocence, has promised to prove it for me, and who has given me you two in the hour that I thought myself most alone. Is not Heaven good after all?"

There was something so pathetic in the manner in which the great eyes were raised, something so sweet and sincere in the beautiful face, something so tremulous and charming in the expression of the lovely mouth, that Grace was greatly touched. She smiled and nodded her head encouragingly in the direction of the little homeless creature, but Nurse Dawson took her in her arms and kissed the lips tenderly.

"There is another who believes in your father's innocence, dearie," she said, in a tone that drew the attention of both girls to her.

She drew back, almost as if she had been betrayed into saying too much, and rising hastily she made a trifling excuse and left the room suddenly.

Neither of the girls seemed to think anything of her departure, particularly as she returned to them almost immediately. But there was a tightening of the lips that had not been noticeable before, a curious repression that neither of them saw, because Olive was giving a detailed account of all that had occurred to her that morning. Nurse Dawson listened with an intensity that was almost painful at times, but not a word passed her lips, even when the recital was finished.

"And so Mabel Naylor is your cousin?" exclaimed Grace, when Olive had concluded. "How extraordinary it all seems! And how little we thought of such a possibility when we went to

visit you in the marsh! How strangely things turn out in this world!"

They continued the conversation in that strain until supper was announced, then they descended to the supper-room. Afterward, Grace proposed that Olive should go to bed at once, but the latter pleaded for a little time longer, declaring that she could not sleep, and Grace kept her with her.

Hugh Manning was announced shortly afterward, and Grace insisted that Olive should accompany her to the drawing-room, and there she was formally introduced to the man whom she had met before.

Honest-hearted and sincere as he was, he expressed his pleasure at seeing her again as earnestly as if she had been a member of his own family, and when something of the circumstances had been explained to him, he expressed his sympathy in a manner that brought a sudden moisture to Grace's eyes.

She loved the great, overgrown boy as only gentle, affectionate women such as she can love, but there was no thought of jealousy in her pure heart of the unhappy girl who was so singularly friendless and alone.

And then, without announcement, Maurice Lemaître entered.

Debonair and handsome as usual, he greeted his hostess with that calm dignity of bearing that was remarkable for one who had acquired it after he had attained the age of manhood. He did not seem as much surprised to see Olive there as Grace had imagined that he would, but what did surprise him was the wonderful beauty of the girl.

He had always known that she was beautiful, but in the costume that she then wore she seemed positively dazzling. He thought he had never seen so exquisite a picture in his life before, and it brought a glow to his cheeks that increased his own good looks immensely.

He pressed Olive's hand with greater warmth than either Grace or Hugh Manning observed, and it was with the greatest effort that he forced himself to join in the conversation that followed.

The night was brilliant. A balmy, delicious breeze was blowing without, and the sky, illumined by stars alone, had never seemed lovelier.

Grace was at the piano when Lemaître asked Olive to go with him into the garden to see the flowers and the night, and rising, Grace wrapped a light shawl about her friend and sent her.

The garden was at the side of the residence, and while not large, was one of great beauty, artistic taste combining magnificently with the tropical glory. There was a rustic seat there among the roses, and it was to this that Maurice led his companion.

"I thought you would want to hear about Jack," he said, as he seated himself in a confidential attitude beside her, "and as it is not always well to let people know too much, I thought it was better not to speak before those people. You are so innocent and pure, Olive, that I am almost afraid to speak lest you misunderstand me, but I hope you have not mentioned me often in your conversation there. You were singularly alone in your marsh home, dear, and it might be misconstrued if you were to mention that I visited you often there. You know that it was right, and I know; but the world might not understand. Do you see what I mean, little one?"

"Yes," she answered in a low tone; "and I appreciate your kindness in wanting to protect my reputation. It is very good of you, Mr. Lemaître."

"Good of me," he repeated, with a curious inflection—"good of me to protect that which I value most upon earth? Ah! child, how little you know!"

She looked at him in a frightened sort of way; then wishing to change the subject, she said,—

"You said that you would tell me of Jack."

"I saw him to-night, and he was fretting about you. That was a great shock to him to-day and he is—not well."

"Jack is ill?"

"Not exactly ill, but not well. You are not to be alarmed about him. I did not know where you were, and consequently could not tell him, and so he has worried about you, but it will be all right now."

"And I may see him?"

Maurice hesitated a moment, then answered,—

"He can not come to you, dear. If I send you a note will you come to him? Before you promise, remember that none of these people must know where you are going."

"Why?"

"Because they might misunderstand. But you know that it is right, do you not? You are not afraid to trust me, are you, Olive?"

"No."

"Then you will come if I send?"

"I will come."

He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he rose almost at once.

"It is not best that we should remain away from them too long," he said. "You don't know the world, little one, or you would understand why it is that I am so careful. I would not have a shadow to touch you for the world. Some day I will tell you why, Olive."

"Will you not tell me now?"

"Not now. You are not in a condition to hear it. I am afraid it would make you dislike me."

"Nothing could do that."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure."

He looked at her for a moment, then sighed. "Not even if I were to tell you that I love you?" he whispered.

She started as if from a blow.

"You would not tell me that," she answered.

"I should not wish you to."

He smiled and pressed her hand lightly, but there was no discouragement visible in his countenance. She looked at him and was reassured. Then she pressed his hand in return.

He did not remain long after that, but took his departure very early, and as he walked down the street a satisfied expression lighted his face.

"The cards are coming my way," he said half aloud. "I have nothing to fear. When I send for her she will come; there is no doubt of that. I have only to keep Jack out of the way. I shall send for her, she will come, and then—"

CHAPTER XVI.

MABEL NAYLOR did not appear the following morning at breakfast. She sent down an excuse of headache to her father, and remained in her own room.

It is possible that he felt relieved at her absence, for he hurried out as soon as he had finished the morning meal, and she watched him go from the cover of her window. She shuddered slightly and drew back as she saw him step jauntily into his coupé, and two words passed her lips. They were:

"A murderer!"

After that she sat down to think, and it was several hours before she lifted her face so that the light could shine upon it.

It had altered cruelly. There seemed to be nothing of the old girlish expression left in it. It was the look of a woman of the world, a woman capable of anything in order to carry a point, a woman who hesitates at no wickedness that promises a way to carry out her wishes.

She rose suddenly and apparently without consideration, and went to the mirror. For a long time she stood there looking at herself earnestly, then a cold sneer curved her lips.

"You are a worthy daughter of your father," she said, nodding at the reflection. "You have no right to censure him, for you would have done the same thing, perhaps, under the same provocation. But it is useless to talk about it. Your life is marked out for you, and you have got to live it the best you can, and make all out of it there is in it. I don't propose that you shall suffer for your father's crimes, and those that are to blame have got to bear the burden, not I. It is the only way."

She turned away with a weary sort of sigh that would have been pathetic in a better woman, and stood there for some time looking at the carpet in a rapt way, and then her lips moved.

"I am glad that I heard that conversation," she said at last. "I am glad that I know the truth, and am prepared for anything that may

come. I think I shall know how to meet you half-way, Maurice Lemaître, and you shall serve my purpose instead of me serving yours. I don't propose to marry you, my dear fellow, though it may be as well to use you under the promise. You don't love me. I might have forgiven you if you had proposed to force this marriage upon me because you did, but now 'all's fair in war.' I have seen your hand and know what trumps you hold. I confess yours to be the best the pack holds, but I can outplay you, since I know your game. You have the strength and I the science. Let us see which is best in the end."

And after that she composed herself, went to bed and took a nap, not having slept much during the night.

It was late when she awoke, and she sprang up and rang for her maid. It was a difficult task-mistress she proved that afternoon. None of her gowns seemed to please her, until she at last tried one of dark, glowing red that made her look like a great glittering ruby in the sinking sunlight. There was something gone from her, something wanting of the girlish beauty that she had showered about her the week before; but somehow she had gained a subtle something that was indescribable.

She had been cold, indifferent, haughty to a degree, but now she seemed to throb with a new life, a new warmth, a new enthusiasm. There was something born in her nature that insensibly altered her. Her beauty had attracted while her manner repelled before; but now there was something alluring, intangible, unspeakable. And she seemed to realise it herself as she watched the reflection in the mirror.

"I should have been called Leukosia one of the sirens," she said, with a smile, "for there shall be death in my witcheries. You shall be neither one of the Argonauts nor Odysseus, Maurice Lemaître, to escape me."

But she knew not how much Olive was like unto Orpheus.

She met her father as he came into the hall with his latch-key, and kissed him as usual. There was not an expression of any kind by which he could have judged that she had overheard the conversation of the evening before, and he patted her head with a loving hand when he had kissed her cheek.

"How gorgeous you are, my darling!" he said looking at her even more lovingly than usual. "You are like some great bird of plumage, graceful, exquisite. You grow more beautiful each day."

"Flatterer!" she exclaimed, lightly. "You will spoil me. My beauty will not be worth much coupled with the vanity that you will beget. But there, let us talk of yourself. You look haggard and worn, dear. I hope you are not trudging your dear old head over that matter of Vincent Farquhar, are you?"

"Is it not natural that it should distress me?"

"Perhaps; but I don't intend to allow it. There! I command you to put it out of your mind at once!"

She drew him playfully into the library and pushed him into the very chair that he had occupied the evening before, when Maurice Lemaître had made him the proposition for his daughter's hand. The act seemed to bring with it remembrance, and he shuddered. She made no comment upon it, however, though she observed it, and he hastened to shake off the horror that was settling upon him.

"I have not seen you since Noel was here last evening," he said to her, endeavouring to speak in his natural tone. "What excuse did he give for his action?"

"None but duty," she answered, with an indifferent shrug of the shoulders. "I think I shall have to teach him a little lesson. I am not worse, I fancy, than others of my sex; but it is not exactly complimentary to be put so completely aside for the sake of duty."

She laughed merrily as she said it, as if to give the lie to her words, but her father started uncomfortably.

"I have a piece of news for you," he said, nervously, "that I think will surprise you somewhat."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, serenely. "What is it?"

"Maurice Lemaitre wants to marry you."

She laughed again, as if the matter were something of a joke.

"And he told you first?" she asked, playfully.

He looked at her curiously.

"Yes," he answered.

"I don't think that was a bit nice of him. It takes half the fun away."

"I told him you were betrothed to Noel Chatteris."

"And, of course, that only made him more in love with me than ever. A man never wants to marry a woman whom no other man wants. A woman is never so nice as when she is engaged, except when she is married."

"Mabel!"

"Now, don't moralise, papa, for I am not in the humour to listen at all. I feel like one of those gay birds of plumage that you say I remind you of, and not at all inclined to be proper." I hope you did not spoil all my fun by forbidding Mr. Lemaitre to declare his passion because I am engaged?"

She said it half mockingly, half earnestly, and Marcus Naylor looked at her for a moment without replying. The mood was so different from any that he had ever seen her in that he could not understand it. He had expected her to haughtily decline to have anything whatever to do with Maurice Lemaitre. He had expected that she would forbid his ever speaking to her upon the subject again.

"No," he stammered; "I did not forbid his doing anything. You don't mean to tell me that you mean to punish Chatteris by flirting with Lemaitre?"

She got up and kissed him.

"I don't mean to tell you anything, you dear old moralist," she answered, still laughing at him in a way that was new to him. "I would not for the world horrify you by telling you any of the dreadful things that I have in contemplation. But when is my new knight expected?"

"This evening."

"He is to speak to me."

"He expected his answer from me, I think."

"Don't give it to him. Send him to me."

"Are you going to throw Chatteris over for Lemaitre, Mabel?"

"I am not going to murder anybody, though you look as if you thought I had some such thing in contemplation. There, don't look so melancholy. You would make a splendid statue of Atlas with the world upon his shoulders now. Is Mr. Lemaitre coming to dinner?"

"Yes."

"I am glad I look so well. I feel as if I were a young girl with my first beau. I am positively quite excited."

"Mabel!"

"Yes."

"I—I don't want you to deceive Maurice. You understand me, don't you? He is a very valuable man to me, and—and it would be greatly against me if—if I should lose his friendship. I can't afford it. You will do nothing to offend him, will you?"

"I think you may trust me," she answered, with a curious infection, that caused him to look at her with a little start. "Go and dress for dinner, Sir Knight of the Doleful Countenance."

CHAPTER XVII.

MAURICE LEMAITRE was just a trifle startled out of his accustomed *sang-froid* when he arrived at the Naylor's house that evening.

The change in Mabel was as apparent to him as to anyone else, and he could account for it as little as could her father. He had never seen her so beautiful, so brilliant as she was upon that occasion. She had emerged entirely from the usual haughty restraint that had before marked her manner, and was bright, effervescent, witty, and the man's determination that she should be his was but augmented.

He could not believe that the knowledge that he wanted her for his wife had wrought the change, for he was perfectly conscious that Mabel Naylor had no more love to give him than he had for her.

Lemaitre was no fool. He felt convinced that his social position, his prestige, were only a matter of short duration unless he made Mabel his wife. Already there were questionings afloat as to how he came by his money, and it was only the favour in which he was received and entertained by the Naylor's that gave him the standing he then enjoyed. And that was the mania of Lemaitre's life.

He did not like to work, and he would not work. He had had enough of that in his young life when living was an up-hill business for him. He had had enough of it, and therefore a partnership in the bank had no attractions for him. The marriage with Mabel was very much more to his taste—and it certainly was not a difficult situation to face, seeing her as he saw her that night.

At a gesture from Marcus Naylor, he followed her when she left the dining-room and entered the drawing-room in her wake.

"No cigar to-night?" she asked, with a dazling smile.

"I would not sacrifice a moment of your charming society for the most choice weed Havana ever produced," he answered, leaning against the mantel-shelf, and looking down upon her admiringly. "I never saw you like this before. Always beautiful, to-night you are a siren. You are incomparable, you are indescribable. What is it? You affect me like a subtle spell. I don't understand it."

She had thrown herself upon a couch and was looking up at him with a bewildering sort of an expression that would have enlaved some men; but there was something in it, he could never explain what, that repelled Lemaitre. It gave him something of the feeling of the naturalist who examines a magnificent exotic, suspecting that a poison lurks in the heart.

"I don't feel in an analytical mood," she answered him, half mockingly, "and therefore you must excuse me if I don't try to solve your problem for you, and explain my own emotions. I rather fancy that I have grown tired of being unlike the rest of the world. Perhaps I have realised that fads are as foolish as fancies, and have determined to be myself in future, dispensing with the curb-bit. It doesn't pay."

"You are quite right, if dispensing with the curb-bit brings this alteration. You are alluring, irresistible. Mabel, has your father told you of my presumption, my darling?"

An expression which he could not fathom crossed her face, leaving it pale for a moment—but only for a moment. The colour came surging back with the slow, mocking smile, and she looked up at him for a little while before replying. Then she said,—

"Yes, my father has told me. You know, of course, that I am betrothed to Noel Chatteris!"

She said it in such a curious tone that he could not prevent a sudden rush of blood to the cheeks, but he answered quietly,—

"Yes, I know that, as everyone does. But are there not some excuses to offer for me, Mabel. Sometimes there is an engagement entered into without love. It might have been something like that with you in the case of your betrothal to Mr. Chatteris. At least, you will not censure me for risking refusal when there is so much at stake."

"And there is so much at stake?"

"Is my love nothing?"

She looked at him for a moment in silence, then laughed aloud.

"Are you in love with me?" she asked, slowly, pausing between her words, as if to give them weight and colour.

"Can you doubt it?" he asked, with an effort at sentimentalism.

"Yes," she answered, putting sofa pillows behind her to lift her up.

He did not remove his elbow from the mantel, nor his chin from his palm as he regarded her. He saw there was to be something more than a formal acceptance or rejection in their interview, and he braced himself for it with as little appearance of it as was possible.

"Why?" he asked, quietly.

"Because you have never given any indication of it?"

"A man does not wear his heart upon his sleeve."

"Some men have none to wear."

The laugh, under other circumstances, would have robbed the words of their import, but Maurice understood a hidden meaning in them.

"No," he answered; "they give it away, and receive none in return."

"Is that what you have done?"

"I hope not. Don't keep me in suspense, Mabel. I love you. Will you be my wife?"

"And if I should say no?"

"I should very greatly regret it," he answered.

"Would that be all?"

"I don't think I quite understand you."

She arose. There was something of the graceful movement of the pantheress about her, as well as something of the animal's curious, fear-inspiring beauty. Lemaitre watched her, fascinated.

She closed the door carefully, letting the *portières* fall behind them, then she turned to him, still holding the folds behind her back. In that position she looked him straight in the eyes for a few minutes, and then in that same panther-like way she approached him and stood before him.

"I am not going to ask you to keep secret that which I am going to say to you," she said, slowly. "I am not going to ask you to allow this conversation to remain a confidence between us, for you will do it without that. You will never mention to any living being that which I shall tell you, because it will be to your own interest to remain silent, and that is the surest way under heaven to make you keep your lips closed."

There was a sort of sneering insult in the last sentence that Lemaitre observed perfectly, but did not choose to comment upon.

"Am I different from the rest of the world in that?" he asked, indifferently. "Do we not all act from self-interest?"

"Perhaps. At least, I am doing so now, or I should not tell you what I shall."

"I confess you interest me. Pray go on."

There was never a handsomer pair than they made as they stood there facing each other, both saints in appearance, with their hearts of satyrs.

"It is simply this," she answered, apparently without emotion of any kind. "Last night I overheard your conversation with my father."

He started as though she had shot him. For a moment surprise kept him dumb, then he recovered himself, and with even more than his accustomed *sang-froid*, he said,—

"Then you know—"

"I know who killed Olive Farquhar; I know where you obtained the money by which you live; and I know why it is that you wish to marry me."

"And knowing all that," he said, carelessly, "what is your answer to my proposition?"

"It is accepted—under conditions."

"And you think you can name conditions to me?"

"I am not a fool, Mr. Lemaitre. I know that you will act only in your own interests, as I have already told you. You have no idea of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. I know that if I were emphatically to decline to marry you, you could and would do nothing. You know that my father's greatest fear is having me know the guilty secret of his life, and you also know that by my having discovered it, and by my remaining silent, I have you in my power."

Lemaitre bowed.

"I neither deny nor affirm anything," he replied. "Name your conditions. If I can accede to them, perhaps I will."

"In the first place, Mr. Lemaitre, you are to say nothing to any one of the arrangement between us for the present. My engagement to Mr. Chatteris is to continue the same as before. You agree to that?"

"For how long?"

"It is impossible to say at present, but for one, two or three months—so long as this trial of Vincent Farquhar lasts. And there are other requests that I shall make of you from time to time. You must promise to act entirely in my interests and to co-operate with me."

"You will make requests of me. Such as what, may I ask?"

"I cannot tell that either, at present. But it may become necessary for the development of a plan I have, that—Olive, the child, you know, should disappear temporarily."

She looked at him, and again he bowed.
"I understand," he answered. "I think you may count upon me."

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

The successful manager thanks his lucky stars for his prosperity.

It is never necessary to tell the money-lender to take a little more interest in his business.

WALKING is said to be the best exercise for brain workers, and it is worthy of note that brain workers can seldom afford to do anything else.

"This is rather an expensive umbrella for you to carry. Did you pick it up at a bargain counter?" "Not exactly. I picked it up at a reception."

"Haven't you written that letter yet, Annie?" "Yes, George, dear. That is, all except the postscript. I'm trying to think of something to say in it."

He: "I don't like the man. He called me an ass once! What do you think of that?" She: "I think his politeness does not compare with his knowledge of natural history."

TRAVELLER: "Do you think the lynch law you have here decreases the number of murders?" Native: "Wall, I danno; but it decreases the number of murderers."

A MATTER OF POSITION.—Buckton: "I have noticed a funny thing about men who have been taken in." Nendick: "What is it?" Buckton: "They are usually very much put out."

"Is this a fast train?" asked the travelling man of the conductor. "Of course it is," was the reply. "I thought so. Would you mind my getting out to see what it is fast to?"

"I CAN'T explain the success of the singer." "Neither can I." "She sings through her nose most atrociously." "Perhaps that is the reason why every one is waving a handkerchief at her."

"You must not be discouraged, George," she said. "Papa may be abrupt, but his heart is as warm as a June day." "Yes," replied George, "I've noticed that his manner is very summary."

SHE: "Miss Sears didn't make out the charge that Chappie had cast reflections upon her." He: "What was his defence?" "He proved that he wasn't bright enough to cast any reflections at all."

THE BRIDE: "Kiss me again, dear." The Groom: "But Madge, I have done nothing but kiss you for the last three hours!" The Bride (bursting into tears): "Traitor! You love another."

SHE: "This is a nice time to come home." He: "My dear, didn't I tell you before we were married that I wasn't worthy of you?" She: "Yes, but I didn't think you would make such desperate efforts to prove it."

"I know my feet are to stand on," said a crabbed individual in a crowded cable car to his neighbour, "but if it is just the same to you I would like that privilege for myself exclusively. Will you please get down on the floor?"

"WHICH do you like best, Uncle Silas, tragedy or comedy?" "Well, for the most part," replied Farmer Pegosh, "I believe I prefer tragedy, for when the killin' comes yo feel that yer gettin' sorter square with the actors."

MISTRESS: "I'd just like to know what was the meaning of all that loud and angry talking down stairs last night." Domestic: "That was just me and me husband, mum." "Your husband?" "You told me when you came that you were not married." "I wasn't then, mum; but you complained about having so much love makin' in th' kitchen, so I married one of 'em."

WAITER: "I expect you to pay in advance." Guest: "What do you mean, sir?" "No offence, sir, whatever; but the last gentleman who ate mackerel here got a bone in his throat and died without paying, and the gov'nor took it out of my wages."

"But why are you so very anxious to see a whale, Mrs. Trotter?" asked the captain, after the lady had asked for the twentieth time if one was in sight. "I want so much to see one blubber, captain. It must be very impressive to see such a large creature cry."

MRS. BINKS: "Ooo! Doesn't it make you nervous to have the wind blow so this time of night?" Mr. Binks: "Why?" "Just hear the windows! They rattle like anything." "Um! It would make me nervous to hear the windows rattle if the wind wasn't blowing."

MEDICAL STUDENT: "People don't want young doctors. How on earth do they get started?" Professor: "It's simple enough. They just sit in their office and fret and worry over the rent until their hair turns grey, and then the patients come with a rush."

YARBLEY: "What time did you get home last night?" Mudge: "I haven't the least idea. Lushforth can tell you. He went home the same time I did." "I don't see why he should know. He was about as demoralized as you were." "More so. But he has a wife."

"I THINK it is an outrage that the ladies wear high hats in the theatre." "Yes, I must admit you men are much more considerate." "Of course we are." "Some of you who get in the front row are even so considerate as to leave your hair at home. You are too good for this world."

EDITOR (anxiously): "Well, doctor, what is the matter with me? Nothing serious, I hope." Doctor: "H'm!—well, you're in a bad way. Your circulation is very low." Editor (excitedly): "What? Why, sir, I have at least two hundred thousand a day! You have been reading a rival sheet, sir."

"My son," said the philosopher, "it does not matter so much what you say as the time you say it. If the festive frog used his raucous voice in announcing the approach of winter instead of heralding the advent of blessed, balmy spring, he would be chased off the earth as a croaker and calamity howler."

SOME time ago a certain poor old shoemaker was vending some of his boots on a stall in the Greenmarket, Dundee, when a customer accosted him thus: "Tasy, mannie, is yer buits anything guid?" "Weel, man, I dinna ken," he replied, "but there's a chappie that works in the bleach-field comes for a pair ilka fortnight, so if they wirna guid he widna tak them."

OLD GENT: "When the children of to day get to be old folks I don't see how they are going to get light enough to read by." Friend: "What's to hinder?" Old Gent: "When I was a boy we used candles, and they gave light enough for young eyes like mine; then, as I grew older, we changed to lamps, and later to gas; and now we have the electric light, and I'm all right yet. I can read by that as well as I used to by candles. But what's to become of the children, who begin with the electric light, that's what I'd like to know."

"THEN you accept me, Ethelinda. Oh, what happiness!" "Yes, but you must see father and mother, George." "As regards your father and mother, Ethelinda," said George, who had been frequently snubbed by both during his courtship, "as regards your father and mother," and he curled his lip and threw out his chest. "Speak low, George," she said. "I think they are both listening." "As regards your father and mother," continued the wily lover, raising his voice, "I think your father is one of the most gentlemanly men I ever met, and as for your mother, she is one of the loveliest of women. I am not surprised that you are so good, so beautiful, so sweet, when I remember you are the offspring of such a pair." "George," said the father, bustling into the room, "she is yours." "And you have our blessing," said the mother. And George, as he adjusted his collar, thought to himself that an ounce of timely compliment is worth a pound of argument.

"PRAY, sir, of what profession are you?" said Mr. Edwin James to a witness, who had come to prove a fact, and who was not deemed a very reputable gentleman. "Sir, I am a shoemaker and a wine merchant." "A what, sir?" said the Learned Queen's Counsel. "A wine merchant and shoemaker." It is unusual in England to combine two such trades. "Then," said Mr. James, "I may describe you as a sherry cobbler!"

In the entrance of a certain public building is a placard, so placed that it confronts the eyes of those who come in bearing these words: "Please wipe your feet." The building is very badly kept, disordered, and full of dust. Not long ago a visitor, after noticing this general untidiness of the interior, took down the sign as he came out, and changed it to a position where it only confronted the eyes of those who were making their exit from the building!

In the year 1838 the *aurora borealis* was seen one night as far south as Wiltshire. The inhabitants of a certain village assembled to witness the unwonted spectacle. Many were the inquiries as to what it was, when a woman exclaimed: "Do the send for our Jack, he's a scholar. I'll be bound he'll give us a name!" When Jack arrived, he looked upward, and said, "Oh, it's only a phenomenon!" "There," said the delighted mother, "didn't I tell 'ee he'd give us a name?"

WHEN Charles Dickens was in Washington, he met, one morning on the steps of the Capitol, a young congressman from Tennessee, whom the great novelist had offended by his boorishness. That morning Dickens was in very good humour and full of talk. "I have," said he, "found at almost exact counterpart of Little Nell." "Little Nell who?" queried the Tennessean. Dickens looked him over from head to foot and from foot to head before he snorted out: "My little Nell." "Oh," said the Tennessean, "I didn't know you had your daughter with you." "I am speaking of the Little Nell of my fiction," said, retorted Dickens, flushing. "Oh," said the imperturbable Tennessean, "you write novels; do you? Don't you consider that a rather trifling occupation for a grown-up man?" Dickens snorted like a quarter-horse, and hurried down the avenue.

WE have all met the people whose pride in their own possessions is so great that they can see no charms in those of others. A young botanist was showing a party of ladies and gentlemen through the conservatory, and expatiating to them the properties of some of the choicest plants and flowers. Among the visitors was a middle-aged lady who, at every description on the part of the botanist, volunteered the statement that the plants and flowers she had at home were quite equal to anything exhibited here, or indeed anywhere. Just as they were passing a giant cactus she was heard to exclaim: "Well, this is nothing extraordinary; I have a cactus at home that is still larger; I planted and reared it myself." "Reared it yourself," the professor gently observed. "How remarkable! This specimen is sixty-three years old, and if yours is still larger—"

The lady did not stay to hear any more, but executed a strategic movement to the rear.
"Did you go to Miss Hunter's wedding?" she asked, effusively. "No! Dear me, you should have been there! Everything was on the grandest scale imaginable. Only one drawback to the whole affair, and no one would have noticed that if it hadn't troubled the bride so much. The decorations defied description—such big masses of flowers, you know. They must have cost a fortune by themselves. And the presents were simply magnificent. One would never tire looking at them. The bridesmaids—well, you know what pretty girls they are—and their gowns were simply superb. These six girls would make a sensation anywhere. As for the bride, she was one of the loveliest brides mortal ever saw. Just enough colour in her face to make her positively entrancing, and her wedding gown was imported from Paris. I saw her *trousseau*, too, and it was the finest ever seen in the city." "But how about the groom?" "The groom? Oh, yes. That was the drawback. Something happened to him, or he got frightened. At any rate, he didn't appear. She seemed terribly cut up about it."

SOCIETY.

THERE is a great likeness between the Duke of York and Prince Henry of Prussia.

The Russian royal jewels comprise the most magnificent collection of pearls in the whole world.

THE Emperor William is credited with the intention to have only general officers of the army represent him as ambassadors to foreign Courts. Even the secretaries of legations are to be army officers exclusively.

TENNYSON is credited with once having advised a man to read a verse from the Bible and a verse from Shakespeare daily: "for," he said, "one will teach you how to speak to God, and the other how to address your fellows."

THE King and Queen of Denmark are expected to visit England in April, when they will be the guests of the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham and at Marlborough House, and after the return of the Queen from Italy her Majesty will entertain them at Windsor Castle.

THE Americans are very anxious indeed that some members of the Royal Family should visit the Chicago Exhibition, and Prince Henry of Battenberg, Lord Lorne, and Prince Louis of Battenberg are likely to cross the Atlantic this summer for that purpose. It is just possible that the Duke of Connaught may go also for a flying visit, when he leaves Portsmouth in August.

THE Princess of Wales is considerate for the well-being of the people, and it is believed to be her intention, on her return to England, to take up some of the public duties which she so gracefully performs. That the Princess will not care to take part in the gay doings of the season will easily be understood, but the young Princesses will be out and about at balls, and there will be the Duke of York, and perhaps the Duchess, to be fêted and made much of.

THE Queen's gardeners, knowing her Majesty's predilection for Lord Beaconsfield's favourite flower, the primrose, have brought the growing of the ordinary field primrose, under glass, to such perfection that the Queen's rooms are supplied with them all the year round. The love of flowers shown by her Majesty is very great, and though the Queen is specially fond of primroses and violets, lilies of the valley and roses are also keenly appreciated.

DURING the last nine months the Queen has privately conferred the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath upon four Royal personages—Prince Henry of Hesse (uncle of the reigning Grand Duke), and Prince Adolphus of Schaumburg-Lippe (the husband of Princess Victoria of Prussia), both of whom were invested by her Majesty at Darmstadt last spring; the Khedive of Egypt, who was invested at Cairo by Lord Cromer; and Prince Ferdinand of Roumania, who was invested by the Queen at Windsor last month. Each of these personages received as a gift the red ribbon and insignia of the Order, including the collar, which is of pure gold.

PRINCESS MARGARET OF PRUSSIA is to visit England in the spring, in order that Prince Frederick of Hesse may be presented to the Queen, who has never yet seen her granddaughter's husband. Princess Margaret will be a great loss to her mother, of whom she has been the constant companion during the last four years, and she was her father's favourite child. Princess Margaret is most amiable and sweet-tempered, as well as being strongly intelligent and highly accomplished. She is thoroughly acquainted with both German and English literature, speaks our language without the slightest trace of a foreign accent, and writes in it perfectly. Princess Margaret has always been the most English in her tastes and habits of all the children of the Empress Frederick; and in this respect she is a great contrast to her sister, Princess Sophie (the Duchess of Sparta), who has prided herself on being a thorough German, and was hardly ever heard to speak English.

STATISTICS.

It is said that 32,000 varieties of goods are now manufactured from wood.

AN average of three British seamen lose their lives every day by drowning, and 300 British steamers and sailing vessels are lost at sea yearly.

ACCORDING to the statistics of the life insurance authorities, an habitual drunkard of 40 has an expectancy of 11 years of life, while a sober man of that age is likely to live 29 years.

THE average healthful man eats nearly two and a half pounds of solid food a day. Upon this basis the daily consumption of food by the human race equals 3,607,770,000 pounds, or 1,610,612 tons.

AN eminent authority has it that the death-rate of the world is calculated to be 67 per minute, 4,030 per hour, 96,720 per day; while the rate of births, slightly exceeding the death-rate, is calculated to be 70 per minute, 4,100 per hour, 100,800 per day, 36,742,000 a year. The estimated increase per annum is therefore a little over 1,500,000.

GEMS.

ERROR loves to walk arm-in-arm with truth, to make itself thought respectable.

INTEGRITY is in taking a stand where we can stand, and keeping the feet to extend our ground.

THOSE who have resources within themselves, and can dare to live alone, want friends the least, but know how to prize them the most.

"SHADOWS are always larger and blacker than the objects that cause them," said some one. This is particularly true of the shadows of the trouble that never comes.

IT is easy to live in the world after the world's opinion. It is easy to live in solitude after our own. But the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of his character.

IF you want knowledge you must toil for it; and if pleasure, you must toil for it. Toil is the law. Pleasure comes through toil, and not by self-indulgence and indolence. When one learns to love work, his life is a happy one.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RICE CURRY.—Put one-half cup of rice into a large kettle of water, and cook just as you would in the usual way. Put two ounces of butter into a saucepan, slice into it one good-sized onion; cover the saucepan and allow the onion to simmer in the butter for half an hour, then add a teaspoonful of curry powder and two tablespoonfuls of stock. If you are without stock, use one-half teaspoonful of ordinary beef extract in two tablespoonfuls of water. Drain the rice; mix with the onion and butter; stand the saucepan over boiling water, uncovered, for twenty minutes, allowing it to steam slowly. Serve at once.

AN ORANGE SALAD.—Fruit is so rapidly becoming an essential, and it is so plentiful in every season, that new ways of preparing and serving it are always welcome. Orange salad is delicious served just before a game course at dinner, as it some way prepares one for a new dish after what has been previously served. For half a dozen persons, you will use four large or six small oranges those with a rather acid flavour being preferred; pare them and slice them very thin, cutting them up and down instead of across. Sprinkle a third of a cup of sugar and two tablespoonfuls of sherry over the fruit, and set it in the refrigerator for about an hour to chill. If the wine is considered objectionable it may be omitted, and the juice of a lemon used in its place.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LOBSTER and salmon are so disliked by the Shah of Persia, that when either is served at a table where he is seated, he leaves the room.

ROSA BONHEUR, the famous animal painter, is said to have been offered sixty thousand dollars by an American for her latest work, "Horses Threshing Corn."

THE Emperor of China thinks there's nothing like leather. He believes that the shoemaker should be liberally patronised, and gives an example by ordering two hundred pairs of boots at a time.

MRS. GLADSTONE's name is on the voter's list at Niagara Falls, Ont.; her ownership of three acres of land at that place entitling her to the franchise. The property was presented to her by Mr. Gladstone.

LORD PLAYFAIR, the newly-appointed Lord-in-Waiting to the Queen, receives £700 a year for services rendered in that post. The Lord-in-Waiting has to attend during a fortnight in each year, and his duties are of a nominal kind.

THE Empress of Austria takes long walking excursions daily in which she tires out her ladies in waiting, conversing all the way in modern Greek with a Greek professor. It is in study and exercise that the empress drives away the attacks of melancholia which have been of such frequent recurrence since the death of her son.

THE Emperor Alexander has freed the Kalmucks of Astrachan from serfdom. These roving people are Buddhists, and they number 150,000 souls. When the other Russian serfs were freed in 1861 the Kalmucks were not permitted to enjoy the results of that reformation, for it was thought that so wild a people would abuse their privileges.

THE Lady Mayoress of York enjoys the distinction of being the only English Mayoress who wears an official chain of office. The custom dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when an exquisitely worked chain of gold was presented to the then mayoress, and has been handed down in lineal civic succession ever since.

THE condition of the Paris shop girls is described as one of great hardship. They have to be in the shop from thirteen to fourteen hours a day, receive very small pay, and are expected to dress well. At some few stores, as the Bon Marche, their circumstances are more pleasant, but in general the girls in the great stores have a hard time. They are compelled to stand all the time they are at work, and the air of the stores is far from exhilarating.

KISSING is not universal. Jimmy Button, the Fuegian, told Darwin that this practice was unknown in his land. It is equally unknown with the New Zealanders, Tahitians, Papuans, Australian blacks, Somalis of Africa, and the Eskimo; and, if Bayard Taylor is to be credited, the women in Finland have an aversion to kissing. In various parts of the world kissing is substituted by the rubbing of noses, as with the New Zealanders and Laplanders, by the rubbing or the patting of the arms, and other parts of the body, or by one man striking his own face with the hands or feet of another.

QUEEN LILUOKALANI, the deposed Queen of Hawaii, must have great sympathy shown her, for she entered upon her most difficult duties at a time when only a determined woman such as she could have maintained any authority at all. When her ministers had refused to sign a proclamation for a new constitution, her Majesty boldly announced that she would address the natives from the steps of her palace. It was for a time in the balance as to which side should give in, a native speaker demanding the instant death of the opposing ministers, whilst a white speaker denounced the Queen and demanded her death. Fortunately no blood was shed, but the Queen had to give way, and a provisional Government had to be appointed which will curb the determined and somewhat revolutionary policy of her Majesty.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

SKATES.—Roller-skates were invented in 1863.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.—We have not the information you require.

TRIOBLE.—A widow is not liable for the support of her son's widow.

SUNFLOWER.—Only incomes of £150 a year and upward are liable to pay income-tax.

DISTRESSED.—A tenant's liability for the repair of a burst water-pipe is a matter of agreement.

DULCIE.—You can get one from any music store, or from Broome's Music Store, 15, Holborn, W.C.

MADAME LAYARGE.—The first stockings made by machinery were made in 1589, at Lee, Scotland.

S. S. S.—To find the requirement for such a situation, you must apply at your nearest railway station.

MARK.—A person of full age cannot be legally prevented from going abroad without his father's consent.

T. A. T.—If you wish to use a crest, you must get a license at the Inland Revenue Office, costing 21s. yearly.

PADDY.—We scarcely advise you to try Ireland for your trade. You would do much better in England at any time.

MECHANIC.—(1.) The landlord cannot arrest your tools; (2.) yes, after he has sold your goods he can get a warrant to eject you.

P. F.—You could get a copy of your father's will at the probate registry of the district in which he died, for a small sum.

T. H.—You will be admitted into any line regiment if the doctor certifies that you are likely to develop into a healthy soldier.

HEARTBROKEN.—Only a solicitor acquainted with the circumstances could tell you the cost of an undefended action for divorce.

PUZZLED.—"Nepeleococcygia" is a Greek word meaning literally "cloud-cuckoo-town;" hence anything visionary; a fool's paradise.

PETER.—Go and pay the expenses at once, there is no escape; they are imposed under special powers conferred by Act of Parliament.

NANCY LEA.—We believe the P. & O. Company make it, as far as possible, a rule to employ the widows of their seamen as stewardesses.

A. B. C.—You must be fifty years before you can compute your pension; you cannot have your pension paid otherwise than in British colonies.

ONE IN DOUBT.—You can be sued for the amount lent, and the I O U, which does not need to be stamped, would be good evidence of the debt.

GAIETY.—Old bottled wine, when pure, always contains sediment, which will give a harsh taste to the wine if disturbed by careless handling.

UNHAPPY LOTTIE.—When an engagement is broken off by the lady the gentleman can sue her for the return of the presents given in view of marriage.

ANXIOUS.—Under the peculiar circumstances you mention we should say that any court of law would order the children to remain in your custody.

JIM'S SWEETHEART.—Age fifteen to twenty-five, height 5 feet 3 inches to 5 feet 6, be able to read and write, good character, no medical examination or ambulance training.

JOLLY.—The Union Jack is the double cross of red and white on a blue ground, the combination being the cross of St. George of England and that of St. Andrew of Scotland.

BEGINNER.—Sixty words a minute is very fair speed on the typewriter. Typewriting may be picked up in from three to six weeks. Stenography requires hard study for at least six months.

DECEIVED.—We are of opinion that the lady has no chance of succeeding in an action against you under the circumstances you mention, seeing that she has not replied to your letters for so long a period.

ONE IN LOVE.—Persons under the age of twenty-one cannot legally marry without their parents' consent. This is a wise provision of the law, for very youthful marriages generally turn out unhappily.

WRATH.—It is against our rules to answer questions by post. You cannot do anything yourself in the matter, but if the young lady can discover the slanderer she can take proceedings against him or her.

R. S.—The Royal University of Ireland is undenominational, though mainly resorted to by Roman Catholics, who do not care to go to Trinity College; but it would be worth more to you to take the London degree.

BARBARA.—What is called Early English style is narrow pointed windows, lancet-shaped and clustered pillars. The Norman, on the contrary, is round-headed doorways and windows, heavy pillars of zig-zag ornaments.

INQUIRER.—The climate of the Cape and South Africa generally very good, winter being mild and summer moderate; clothing and house rent dearer than at home; food about the same as here; board therefore about 15 per cent. higher there; send 1d. stamp to Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W., for "Cape Handbook," gratis.

BOY BLUE.—If you got engaged in a sailing ship or steamer you would be expected to learn seamanship, and not to leave when you reached the Cape. There is little hope of your being allowed to work your passage out.

INQUIRER.—Probably because scarlet is most remarkable, and men so clothed are more easily picked out by the enemy on the field of battle. There was a proposal some time ago to clothe soldiers in grey, so as to avoid observation.

C. I.—Copyhold is a tenure of estate by copy of court roll, or a tenure for which the tenant has nothing to show except the rolls made by the steward of the lord's manor. A freehold is an estate in real property, of inheritance or for life.

LAUNCE.—Boys can join the navy between the ages of fifteen and sixteen-and-a-half. Application should be made for a form at the nearest coastguard or marine recruiting station, or to the captain of any of Her Majesty's drill-ships.

STRONG-MINDED.—The franchise has been granted to women in some of the United States; in Wyoming, for instance, not only do women vote, but they occupy positions of highest trust in the local government, and on the judicial bench.

AMBITION.—The best reading for a seventeen-year-old boy is history of his own and other countries, and scientific works of popular interest, such as tell of the peculiar features of the earth, air and water. Also a few of the best stories of popular authors.

DAD.—There is no assistance offered to any class of emigrants, and we fear the cost of passage would be too much for you; at least £40 would be needed to take you and family out; once there you would get work on a farm, and the climate is magnificent.

QUITE ANOTHER THING.

"If I were married, and the one I chose for love, loved me, I'd try to keep my way of life Much as it is," says she.

"Thus, if I cared to take a walk With some nice, pleasant man, Or have a confidential talk

All on platonic plan— I'd quite expect my husband to

Make way, as husbands should— In short, allow me what I wished

Of proper latitude. To visit theatres and balls,

With other gentlemen— Receive nice notes, and friendly gifts

And all such things, and then—" "Then," said her listener, eagerly,

"You'd let him do the same, And go about with charming girls,

And have his little game. You'd like to see him just as gay

As if he were not wed. With other women." "WOULD I, though?

I'd have his life!" she said.

M. B.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Having become a naturalised citizen of the States, you would be within your right in divorcing your wife for desertion if she refused to join you, and the decree would have force all over the world; it would not be necessary to get divorce here also.

ETHEL.—We are unable to give you the address of the Registrar, but would advise you to consult a local directory. You do not say whether the marriage is to take place by license or not; if by license the cost would be about £2 3s., without license about 13s. In either case it is necessary to have two witnesses.

A HAPPY YOUTH.—The engagement-ring is worn on the same finger as the wedding-ring, or on the fourth finger, counting the thumb one of the right hand. A band of gold chased, resembling a keoper, may be used. Opals and emeralds should be avoided, but diamonds, pearls, rubies, or turquoises are perfectly safe for setting in an engagement-ring.

BOTHERED MARY.—Try what putting a handful of quicklime in your kettle will do, and leave it in over night, then well rinse it out and scour the inside with coarse sand or sandpaper. After again rinsing, put a lump of Scotch soda in the kettle and allow it to boil. When boiled, empty out the water and well rinse. You will find the kettle clean. You must never leave water in such a kettle over night.

HAL.—The limits of age for the Royal Irish Constabulary cadets are twenty-one and twenty-six. Candidates must be unmarried, and at least 5 feet 5 inches in height. They must have a nomination from the Lord Lieutenant through the Chief Secretary for Ireland and the Inspector-General of the Royal Irish Constabulary. It is useless for us to give you the subjects of examinations unless you can get a nomination.

JACK.—Stokers in the navy receive a commencing salary of £30 8s. 4d. per annum with rations. The age for admission is between eighteen and twenty-five; height, 5 feet 4 inches; girth of chest, 32 inches. Working dresses are supplied gratis; but stokers must purchase their own clothes from the ship's stores. After twenty or twenty-one years' service stokers are eligible for pensions, varying from £31 to £52 a year and upwards. Men who join for ten years' continuous service get £1 for bedding, and £2 10s. towards their outfit. Men who enter for five years get the same allowance for bedding, but nothing for clothing. It is not necessary to have held the same position before.

H. Y.—If he is the father of the child, no matter what his age may be, law will compel him to assist in maintaining it as far as his means will permit; the child must live, you see; and if it is hard for its own father to enable it to do so, it would be obviously much harder to compel others to bear the burden.

MAY.—When the pianist plays a vocal score as instrumental, and without the voice, he keeps the air prominent, and plays the other two rows as a series of chords. Whether entirely with the left hand or with both depends upon the arrangement. In most cases the notes may be divided between the two hands.

LOIS.—It is not legal for you to marry again except you first divorce your first husband, or ascertain that he is dead; if after making exhaustive inquiry for the man in all places where he is likely to be heard of, you fail to find any trace of him, you are probably safe in considering that he is dead; and describing yourself as a widow.

A. T.—A marriage license obtained at Doctor's Commons, St. Paul's Churchyard, or in the country from the Bishop's Surrogate, is available for use immediately, provided one of the parties has resided for fifteen days previously within the parish of the church in which the marriage is to be celebrated. The cost of such a license is in London about £2 2s. 6d., and in the country from £1 15s. to £2 12s. 6d.

TEACHER.—It depends a good deal on the individual whether a grammar-school pupil is qualified to teach. Some are born teachers, and, having a taste that way, are really more capable than many others who have taken a much more extensive course of study. If you are well up in the branches taught in a good grammar-school, and have a liking for it, there is no reason why you should not be a successful primary-school teacher.

SEE.—Try one part carbolic acid to two parts of pure glycerine, wash the spots in hot water, then absorb the moisture with a soft towel, and apply the mixture, taking care that it touches none of the surface around the patches. If it smart, wash it off with warm water and castile soap, and touch the spot with a lotion made of one part glycerine to six parts rose-water. Use carbolic acid with caution, as it is highly corrosive, and will burn like live coals.

X. Y. Z.—It amounts to this—that a debt which was contracted six or seven years ago, and of which there is no proof in writing under the hand of the debtor, has long prescribed, and cannot even be recovered except the debtor, when put on oath, says he owes the money; if he declares he believes he paid it, or has no distinct knowledge of it, the case will be thrown out; in circumstances such as you describe we should say there was no loan—the money was given.

MAR.—Dissolve half an ounce of isinglass in three-quarters of a teacupful of water, and put in a stewpan over a slow fire, stirring till dissolved; then strain into a teacup. Rub three or four lemons on loaf sugar till yellow rind is all off, break the sugar into a basin, and add the juice of a lemon and three-quarters of a pint of cream. Whisk up briskly into thick froth sugar to taste, add your isinglass (which should be nearly cold) and whisk till it nearly sets; then put it in your pewter ice-pots, cover with paper, and place in your freezer. This is lemon ice cream. Any flavour can be used instead of lemon.

E. B.—Rocks do not grow in the sense that a plant grows. They may increase by accretion, and they may undergo chemical change. The old sea bed being lifted up becomes sandstone and limestone; the volcanic ash and lava strewn over the plains become tufa, hard enough for building stone; the pebbly shore of a river becomes conglomerate. The simple mineral does grow, however, when it takes a crystal form. The sparkling prism of quartz increases from an atom to a crystal as large as a forearm by a process of addition and assimilation wonderfully slow, but beautifully regular, exactly as crystals of ice form on the window-pane.

BASHFUL.—A man must be proclaimed for marriage in the parish in which he resides; it is immaterial whether he is a member of the church there, or of any church at all; the "lines" referred to are not "lines" of membership, but the lines the session will give you when the proclamation has been made; these are taken to the registrar of the district in which the marriage is to take place, and the registrar, on seeing them, grants the necessary schedule authorising any minister to celebrate the marriage; so find out what parish you are in, ascertain session-clerk's address, and go to him with two householders witnesses to give the necessary information for the proclamation.

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